

Veterinary communication, collaboration and networking,

GVS workshop 5th June 2007

On 4 & 5 June 2007, vets working for the UK government met in Glasgow and addressed their role in the wider European context. As part of this, a workshop called “Collaboration in Europe” was held. This workshop was led by Kumar Sivam, and built on the talk he gave, “Building better collaboration across Europe”, given earlier on the second day of the conference.

In the workshop, Teresa Belcher from Med-Vet-Net and Dawn Giddens from Animal Health (formerly the State Veterinary Service), gave presentations covering the collaborative work that each was leading in their respective organisations.

Med-Vet-Net has several years’ experience using and developing a range of communication tools, including the newsletter (now available to sign up as an electronic alert), the website, discussion boards and the *WebEx* webcam meeting facility.

Animal Health, has been working for a two years, developing their *Networks of Expertise*. A pilot network has been set up for those working in animal by-products, and involves more than 100 participants.

Both Teresa and Dawn talked about the successes and difficulties they had encountered, which stimulated considerable interest in the audience. What is clear is that there is massive potential for improving our working lives as information and communications technology become more advanced... but we have some way to go to implement systems that fully meet our needs and that will drive great changes in the way we work.

Some key points emerged:

- That communication is people-focused; technology is the enabler.
- We need to accept that new systems have to be piloted to really see what needs they fulfil. This necessitates acceptance of a degree of learning and possible mistakes.
- Instant messaging has the potential to be a useful addition to the current range of communications tools.
- Those who have not grown up with information technology may be more reluctant to get involved, but with personal help they can become as enthusiastic as anyone in using new systems.
- It is often said that people must meet each other face to face on at least one occasion to form a viable virtual community. This is not so, as has been demonstrated by the many web-based interest groups. The mode of virtual collaboration used by Animal Health recognises this and works around and through the challenge presented by bringing strangers together around a common interest.

It was truly gratifying that Teresa and Dawn’s contribution was so well received, and the overall message that we have a great deal to gain just by taking some time to get

to grips with the tools already available. This will keep us up to date and able to take advantage of improvements in technology in the future.