

To all UK veterinary pathologists

Friday, December 09, 2005

Dear All

Re: "British Society of Veterinary Pathology"

Over the past few years, I have been involved in trying to increase the profile of veterinary pathology within the RCVS, and have received a great deal of encouragement and support from a number of people in establishing the Veterinary Pathology Liaison Group – our first step. Following on from that, I have been investigating the possibility of providing practical educational support for both established veterinary pathologists and trainees.

I should point out, at the outset, that the provision of post-graduate education and CPD is not the remit of the RCVS, is practicable only on a limited scale for the Royal College of Pathologists and is also available on a relatively limited basis in the UK through the European Veterinary Pathology and Veterinary Clinical Pathology organisations. I would like to see more educational activities in our discipline within the UK, with the opportunity to bring the various sub-specialties closer together and to provide a focus for the activities of all varieties of veterinary pathologist.

At a recent meeting of a small group of teachers in veterinary pathology, we had informal discussions about providing some structured, didactic presentations to veterinary pathology residents who are in training for professional examinations. They could be similar, **but not identical**, to the educational modules that are currently organized by the British Society of Toxicological Pathologists (BSTP) and would aim to cover most of the basic information that the residents might need but in a shorter time frame.

For those that don't know of them, the BSTP Modules provide thirteen, week-long courses of lectures and practical classes intended to cover the full range of topics required for the basic training of a toxicological pathologist (over a period of 4 years). They are, however, aimed specifically at toxicological pathologists, are limited to 30 places, attract many overseas participants (about 50%) and are heavily oversubscribed and cannot meet the needs of vet school residents.

To organise a post-graduate educational initiative through the veterinary schools themselves would require them all to meet together to discuss and coordinate their activities in a timely fashion within a busy university timetable. Unfortunately, it is difficult to get representatives from all the schools together in the same place, at the same time. The feeling of the people at the small *ad hoc* meeting we did manage to convene was that I should take on the unenviable task of coordinating this initiative (as I have been Chair of the BSTP Education Sub-committee for some years).

Contemplating this possibility, my mind also turned to the feasibility of using the modular educational programme for continuing professional development (CPD) as well as for basic training. Although a modular approach could possibly serve this dual function, other additional courses and meetings may be deemed necessary. I also thought about communicating information to potential attendees, handling the logistics of enrolment and organisation of the courses and the possible need for a web site (not a particular difficulty as I was the BSTP webmaster for several years) and other means of communication.

As I pondered running this rapidly-expanding enterprise as a one-man project, I looked at my busy work schedule (with considerable overseas travel) and decided that the task was too big for me on my own. Having identified the need to convene a group to help me, therefore, there was a choice of recruiting assistance in an *ad hoc* manner or forming a larger, more autonomous organisation.

In this roundabout way I came to the conclusion that we need a British Society for Veterinary Pathology (the BSVP or whatever it might be called). After all, if there is a British Veterinary Camelid Society (I found their web site and it does not even include camels!) with about 100 members, there is no reason why we could not form a society of veterinary pathology. If we encompass all aspects of the species range and all the sub-disciplines of anatomic pathology, clinical pathology, immunology and microbiology there will be a large, potential constituency.

I am told there have been similar initiatives in the past that have failed, but I am also aware that there is currently a cadre of enthusiastic, committed pathologists who could help to launch such a venture and make it succeed. After all, there are activities like the Kegworth meetings, the AVTRW Pathology sessions and the Veterinary Trainees web site as well as the trainees' networks runs by the Royal College of Pathologists and BSTP that indicate there is a willingness to get up and organise events by some of our number. I accept that all voluntary organisations rely upon a great deal of good will and hard work from a number of willing individuals but I think that there are sufficient people out there to get it going and the time is right.

In the first instance I need to ascertain whether there is sufficient support to get it off the ground. If we can identify a suitable body of individuals who are prepared to actually get the ball rolling, it would then be appropriate to call an inaugural meeting to agree the ground rules and select a provisional Council. This means that we would have to identify people willing to take on the onerous roles such as Chair, Hon Secretary and Hon Treasurer as well as those wishing to commit themselves with a lower profile. The provisional council's remit might be to draft a constitution, register with the Charities Commission, establish a bank account, construct a web site, recruit members and, perhaps, organise the first scientific meeting. At an agreed time, a full AGM would be convened when the first official Council would be elected.

The initial function of the society might be the practical provision of educational (and other) opportunities to the membership, including a membership list of UK veterinary pathologists (which many people would appreciate). I have included two appendices to this letter for those who are interested in seeing some more detail and are keen to pitch in. These outline a few ideas about the possible organisational details and the potential benefits and opportunities for growth but only represent my initial thoughts.

The foundation of the organisation will require commitment, enthusiasm and a 'hands-on' attitude with clear vision and a spirit of cooperation. It will not be easy, of course, but very little that is worthwhile has proven to be so. If there are sufficient souls out there who share the same goals, we will get it off the ground and the silent majority will eventually want to join in due course. The ESVP Meeting in Edinburgh next year might be a good place to launch it.

If you wish to participate, or just indicate your support for the venture, please send me an e-mail at kicitp@aol.com. If there is someone you know, who works in veterinary pathology that has not received this letter, please forward them a copy.

There is a Chinese proverb that says: "Even a journey of 10,000 miles begins with the first step."

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APPENDIX 1

What might be the remit of a society and how would it be organised?

- 1) The society would be committed to the advancement, support and promotion of veterinary/animal pathology (including Anatomic Pathology, Clinical Pathology, Immunology and Microbiology) in the UK. This would include the support of post-graduate training and continuing professional development.
- 2) The society would be registered as a charity.
- 3) The society would be open to all scientists working in the field of animal pathology, rather than being restricted to veterinary graduates and membership would not be dependent on the possession of post-graduate qualifications in pathology.
- 4) In the first instance, I feel it should probably not be a sub-division of a larger organisation as it could prove too inflexible to operate efficiently.
- 5) An annual meeting would be necessary for the statutory AGM and would offer the opportunity for a scientific meeting as well as social interaction between members.
- 6) A council would be required to administer the business of the society and might comprise a President (who acts as Chair), Ex-President (eventually), and President-elect, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Treasurer, an Education Officer and a number of Councillors (if required). It would be nice to gather a sufficient representation of each major branch of the discipline, but we have to accept that veterinary pathology is a broad church and this may be difficult to achieve whilst keeping the Council to a workable size.
- 7) Methods of election and terms of office would need to be decided. Terms of office would have to match the practicalities of maintaining an experienced nucleus and grasp of any long-standing issues and initiatives, against the need for new blood, the avoidance of 'commitment fatigue' and succession planning.
- 8) Web site and communications (e.g. notices/newsletters) could be coordinated in the Council but may not need a designated post in the constitution. I am willing to run the web site, if required.
- 9) Education initiatives would best be organised by a sub-committee chaired by the Education Officer. This would encourage the participation of more members in the organisation of educational events (outside the Council's activities) and would be undertaken by willing volunteers. I would anticipate a small 'core' team to provide continuity and a larger number of occasional contributors.
- 10) The society would need to be financially self-sustaining and I would propose that the revenue be derived from educational activities and sponsorship rather than by high membership fees.
- 11) Acquisition of sponsorship could be overseen by a Councillor or other willing volunteer.
- 12) The society could provide an opportunity for many commercial organisations to reach this particular target audience – with a financial benefit to the running costs of the society.

- 13) The employment of a professional 'Secretariat' on an *ad hoc* basis may be considered for organising meetings etc. This would be a point for discussion.
- 14) Membership fees should be relatively modest (to encourage membership) but we would probably need an early injection of funds (from a sponsor or two) to kick the whole thing off.
- 15) There should be no preference for any particular examination system or College.
- 16) I recommend that the society affiliate itself to the ESVP.

APPENDIX 2

Some of the more obvious benefits:

- 1) There would be a common, easily accessible reference point for veterinary/animal pathologists in the UK at a modest cost.
- 2) A society might satisfy those that would like access to a membership list – something the Colleges cannot administer.
- 3) The society could be a major provider of post-graduate training and CPD at a relatively modest cost. It might relieve the Vet Schools from the onus of organising post-graduate education modules for their residents and make the process more flexible. Indeed it could attract people from the continent if the educational activities are sufficiently well thought out.
- 4) It would seem to me that some of the current CPD and educational events that are organised might be better conducted under the aegis of the new society. If this is not acceptable, then jointly organised meetings should be encouraged.
- 5) Coordination and close links with sister societies should be positively encouraged and cooperation with European colleagues is essential.
- 6) Veterinary pathology as profession in the UK could be promoted and supported more effectively than before and encourage greater contact with undergraduates.
- 7) A political forum for veterinary pathologists would be available and the experience gained by some members could provide a platform should they that wish to extend their influence to other relevant organisations (e.g. RCVS, RCVS, and European Colleges etc.)
- 8) I hope there would be an informal means of coordinating training opportunities through the activities of the society as well as attracting new graduates to pathology. Links with undergraduates should be actively pursued.
- 9) There would be opportunities for informal scientific and political discussion, networking and communication with other organisations (e.g. RCVS, RCVS, and European Colleges etc) as well as recruitment and dissemination of information about other symposia, courses etc.
- 10) Meetings could be structured to include opportunities for younger pathologists to make presentations and gain experience of public speaking.

- 11) The responsibility and workload for organization of activities would be spread amongst a larger group. This encourages a healthy balance and interchange of ideas.
- 12) There would be an opportunity for working pathologists in all fields to make a meaningful contribution to the development of their own discipline – a chance to give something back.