WSAVA volunteer scheme for vets and nurses

WSAVA Global Outreach is a new initiative that aims to help share the knowledge and experience of WSAVA members through veterinary volunteer schemes. Dave Kenyon, chairman of South African Veterinary Association’s community veterinary clinics (SAVA-CVC) project, invites vets and VNs to get involved and describes what they can expect.

TWO outreach initiatives will take place in the run up to this year’s WSAVA congress, which takes place in Cape Town, South Africa, from September 16 to 19. They aim to bring veterinary help to local communities in the form of mobile clinics and an education outreach service.

On behalf of SAVA-CVC, I organise mobile veterinary clinics that serve deprived communities; it relies on veterinary staff volunteering their time. I also own Hatfield Bird and Animal Hospital, a busy practice in Pretoria East.

Judging by the experience of others who have volunteered with us, it will be a life-changing experience, giving those involved a unique opportunity to see the real South Africa and to meet the ordinary people who make it such a special country. They will make a difference every day they are with us, assisting at three CVC clinics around Pretoria in Gauteng province, which is the smallest province in South Africa, but also our most populous.

What volunteers do

Volunteers working in the mobile clinics take part in the activities they feel most comfortable with, including parasite control, vaccination and neutering, with as much support from an experienced CVC vet as they need. They will also be able to help with our education outreach – talking to owners about pet care is a key aspect of SAVA-CVC’s work.

Most of the clinics are run by one or two supervising vets and two lay people, who are often community members. When veterinary volunteers are also available to help, CVC is able to offer a much higher level of service, especially when it comes to explaining common health problems and the reasons for sterilisation, as well as offering primary healthcare to the maximum number of animals. It is not uncommon for between 50 and 150 pets to be brought along to a two- to three-hour clinic.

Although the focus is on primary healthcare, vets are often required to assist with clinical cases: babesiosis and ehrlichiosis are common, as well as distemper and parvovirus. Injuries are also seen, and usually include wounds and dog bites. With the low level of parasite control in these areas, severe cases of verminosis, tick and flea infestations and fly bitten ears are not uncommon. It is easy to distinguish the owners who bring their pets to the clinic regularly.

CVC does not have the resources to deliver much more than primary healthcare so, if it cannot assist with a particular case, the owner is referred to the closest animal welfare facility.
Facilities vary depending on the location and WSAVA volunteers will experience a variety of clinics – some clinics are conducted under a tent (gazebo) on a vacant piece of land. Others use existing community facilities, perhaps a sheltered area with a tap. Some clinics are conducted in a variety of locations – some clinics are conducted under a tent (gazebo) on a vacant piece of land. Others use existing community facilities, perhaps a sheltered area with a tap. Most volunteers find that the experience challenges their preconceived ideas about South Africa. Some are surprised at how much the people love their animals and that animal care is only limited by lack of knowledge and the available resources. The common perception that townships are dangerous no-go areas is also untrue. While, of course, it is sensible to be careful and aware of your surroundings, experience shows that the people are invariably welcoming and friendly.

Volunteering is also an emotional experience, such as the uplifting moments when volunteers provide vital help or relief, although, inevitably, there will be difficult moments too. It seems that one of the hardest things to realise that you can only do so much, although communities are grateful for what can be done.

It's not all work
Volunteers are vital to the survival of the service and leisure time is important too. Helpers benefit from visits and tours, which might include a visit to SAVA’s headquarters at Vethouse, Onderstepoort, the Veterinary Academic Hospital and the National Veterinary Museum. The programme ends with a two-night stay at the Pilanesberg Nature Reserve.

If you’ve already signed up to attend the world congress, why not think about joining one of the WSAVA’s outreach schemes? Not only will you gain a real insight into South African society, but you will make a significant contribution to the pets and people who rely on vets for their wellbeing.

Ten vets and vet nurses are needed for a five-day placement between September 8 and 14 (the week before the world congress) to work with SAVA-CVC, thanks to sponsorship from Hill’s Pet Nutrition. If demand is high, SAVA-CVC may run an additional outreach programme in the week following the congress, commencing September 22.

In addition, the WSAVA’s Animal Wellness and Welfare Committee (AWWC) is offering up to 10 vets and VN volunteer opportunities to volunteer for its Community Led Animal Welfare (CLAW) service. Volunteers are invited to provide their services between September 8 to 13 to help CLAW personnel run mobile veterinary clinics, thanks to an educational grant from Waltham and the WSAVA’s AWWC.

Further details of both volunteer programmes can be found at www.wsava.org and www.wsava2014.com

Diary of a parliamentary intern

Hannah Jordan, parliamentary intern to Lord Trees, describes what’s been happening in parliament since the Easter recess.

Parliament reconvened after Easter and business started swiftly with a much-anticipated meeting of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare. The meeting – to discuss welfare at slaughter – had been postponed in order for it to follow the publication of a European Commission study into consumer views on including stun ‘status’ on meat labels. However, like many long-awaited documents, the publication has been delayed. Nonetheless, the meeting went ahead and there was a robust and, at times, heated exchange of views.

The All-party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for Beef and Lamb has also been busy, taking evidence from stakeholders in order to produce a report on slaughter welfare. Lord Trees gave evidence with others to five MPs from the APPG. It was fascinating to watch this session because there is more back and forth discussion than in the Lords’ chamber. Evidence giving is definitely not for the meek – you cannot make an assertion without clear evidence to back it up or an MP will have your guts for garters. The next session is scheduled for June 3.

On Monday, May 12, the Animal Welfare Foundation held its annual Discussion Forum. The day was well attended and the discussions were well delivered and thought provoking. It was interesting to hear the difficulty vets and farmers have in interpreting transport legislation: it all seems well and good when the legislation is written, but the practicalities of using or enforcing it are often not so straightforward, and may have negative consequences on the welfare of the animals involved.

The Medical Detection Dogs (www.medicaldetectiondons.org.uk) charity recently held a reception to which Lord Trees was invited and I managed to gatecrash. The dogs are trained to screen samples for volatiles produced by cancer cells or as medical alert dogs that detect odour changes in their owners that are associated with certain events. I was dubious that these dogs could sniff out cancer, but both the presentation and demonstration were most interesting; I would urge you to find out for yourself.

Last, but not least, this week Defra quietly informed the industry that, following further consideration by ministers, the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing (England) legislation (WATOK) will be revoked before it has come into force. It was due to be brought into force in May 2014, but new enforcement in abattoirs will continue under the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 as amended and the Animal Welfare Act 2006. It will be interesting to find out what the further considerations were.

Parliament was exhausted after two weeks sitting and has since prorogued for another three weeks until the State Opening of Parliament on June 4. I am lucky enough to have been allocated a ticket in the gallery of the Lords’ chamber and a mild panic has ensued as I have to acquire an appropriately small hat. Wish me luck!