Diary of a poultry intern

In his post as poultry intern, William Garton is finding that CPD takes up a large proportion of his time. This, he says, can be quite enjoyable, particularly when events are sponsored by international pharmaceutical companies. This month, he has been on two training courses, one in Spain and the other in Belgium.

Towards the end of April I was invited to attend a day’s training on coccidiosis in broilers with the pharmaceutical company, Hipra. The course was held in Amer, Spain, with hospitality based in Girona; a typical, lovely little Hispanic town full of culture and restaurants. The training was delivered in the company’s head office with lectures focusing on the interpretation of coccidiosis lesions and the application of spray vaccinations. This was well complemented by an afternoon of lesion scoring in postmortem specimens of birds specifically inoculated with each of the *Eimeria* species. I spend a lot of my clinical time scoring coccidiosis lesions and it is reassuring to have confirmation of the correct diagnosis as lesion type and location can be species-specific. The lesion severity is largely subjective, so receiving advice on lesion scoring again adds confidence to the diagnosis.

Early this month, I jet-setted off to Ghent, Belgium, at the invitation of Huvepharma for a workshop on intestinal health. Again, the workshop looked at coccidiosis, but also in another host species: turkeys. It also considered another important disease in broiler production: necrotic enteritis. The morning lectures were followed by a rotating group practical looking at broiler and turkey coccidiosis lesions, lesions of blackhead (histomoniasis) and one of the consequences of intestinal disease: footpad dermatitis. The day concluded with a scenic boat cruise along the river Leie that winds its way through the city of Ghent.

Both of these courses focused on a key area that highlights the motivation of the poultry industry, not only bird welfare but also economic importance. Coccidial infection and poor intestinal health clearly have a negative impact on an animal’s ability to absorb and use the nutrients from its diet. This can have a greater influence on the animal’s overall health but also, of particular concern in intensive livestock production, its feed conversion ratio and growth potential. Factors such as profit and loss in livestock farming are topics that undergraduate training struggles to convey, and yet it is clear from my growing clinical experience that these are a top concern for producers who require their vet to think about the bottom line when providing advice.

Working closely with the pharmaceutical industry is a key part of a poultry vet’s role to ensure access to and availability of vaccines and licensed medication. It has been encouraging to attend these events alongside other young professionals involved in poultry production, including nutritionists and livestock managers, who among them offer a positive future for this sector.

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