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PROFESSION MISSING THE TRICK ON MRSA

ALL companion animal practices should have a written, enforceable policy on controlling MRSA and other infections, say senior figures in the BVNA and VN Council.

Following the first international conference on MRSA in animals, practice principals and nursing staff should be working hand in hand to improve procedures.

BVNA president, Julia Davenport, said the veterinary profession had missed the trick by excluding a nursing education stream in the conference held at the University of Liverpool, between June 19-21.

"The nurse has the knowledge to ensure that good hospital practice and hygiene measures are followed at all times, and can use this knowledge to cross-train other members of the practice team," she said. "Nurses should be practising good hygiene at all times and they are trained to do this."

WORKSHOPS

Tracy Mayne, training and development advisor at Vets 4Pets, said although most nurses know MRSA can be controlled with good hand hygiene and infection control protocols, nursing workshops are needed.



Tracy Mayne: "nursing workshops are needed".

Robin Fearon, VN Times reporter

investigates the need for nursing workshops in infection control, following the first international conference on MRSA for the veterinary profession

"It is important that they know how to identify MRSA through postoperative checks and how to manage hospitalised cases that have MRSA or are suspected cases," she said. "I expect most nurses would attend a workshop that advises them on how to update their barrier nursing, isolation and infection control knowledge, since MRSA has appeared in practice."

"Nurses are called upon to explain to worried owners what the practice does to prevent MRSA and all UK nurses need to know what to say to put owners' minds at rest."

She also warned that policies should be enforced from the top down for maximum effect: "I have seen too many practices where the VNs write and uphold excellent protocols, but the senior partners and assistant vets ignore them."

IMPROVED PRACTICE

Jill Moss, the conference co-organiser and head of MRSA animal charity, the Bella Moss Foundation, said veterinary nurses are crucial to the development of improved practice and wants to organise CPD days for nurses in infection control. Ms Moss started the charity after her dog died from a MRSA-related infection.

"We've had contact from some veterinary nurses who have told us that although they would like to make the use of anti-microbial handrubs standard where they work, they have great difficulty convincing vets that such a change would bring benefits."

COMPLACENT

Speaking at the conference, Tim Nuttall, a professor of veterinary dermatology at the University of Liverpool, said: "Traditionally the veterinary profession has been complacent when it comes to infectious disease control. We've not regarded these as being serious problems and we've always thought there would be an antibiotic to control it."

"Discussing MRSA, motivating and educating your staff as a group is how you'll achieve success. Have a policy and enforce it. There's no point in having a written policy that's filed away and never referred to."

BARRIER NURSING

Professor Nuttall said the influence of a senior nurse in enforcing policy is decisive. Barrier nursing is reinforced vigorously at the university's small animal hospital and he concluded that practices need staff to be trained with a "microbiologically clean mindset".

Speaking on behalf of the RCVS VN Council, chairman Andrea Jeffery said practices must develop hygiene and infection control strategies that involve all members of staff.

"We would encourage nurses to take a proactive role in

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planning and implementing hygiene protocols in consultation with veterinary colleagues," she said.

Ms Jeffery said that practices assessed under the Practice Standards Scheme must observe standard operating procedures for infectious disease and barrier nursing, at all tiers.



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