Kidney transplants in cats: RCVS considers its guidance

The RCVS officers and chief executive at the Council meeting on March 3: (from left) Amanda Boag (treasurer), Stuart Reid (senior vice-president), Bradley Viner (President), Nick Stace (chief executive) and Chris Tufnell (junior vice-president)

DESCRIBING progress with a review of the RCVS’s guidance on feline renal transplants, David Catlow, chairman of the RCVS Standards Committee, said that the Council was being asked to advise on what the next steps should be.

The guidance has been suspended while it is under review. It was originally developed and approved by the RCVS Council in 2003 but, in April 2013, the Standards Committee was asked to review the College’s position on renal transplants, primarily due to major changes in UK animal welfare legislation.

Mr Catlow explained that, as part of the review, the Standards Committee had sought legal opinion as well as advice from the RCVS’s Science Advisory Panel on scientific and ethical issues relating to feline renal transplantation.

The legal opinion had pointed out that there were differences between the legislation in place in the different countries of the UK, particularly in relation to prohibited procedures and what constituted a ‘mutilation’. It was possible that the organ harvesting procedure from a living source could breach aspects of the law in some countries but not others. However, the opinion was clear that, in all jurisdictions, there would be a significant risk that an offence of unnecessary suffering would be committed if a living source was used.

It suggested that, if the RCVS felt that the use of pre-euthanasia donors was ethically acceptable, then the College could apply to the Home Office for an exemption from the legislation.

The Science Advisory Panel had recommended that the RCVS should not support the use of living source donors on the basis of the legal opinion. However, it said there was no scientific or ethical reason for the RCVS not to permit, with suitable safeguards, renal transplantation in cats from pre-euthanasia donors, although there might be legal argument in some parts of the UK that the procedure might constitute mutilation, and this issue needed to be resolved.

Asking for the Council’s views, Mr Catlow said that the Standards Committee had accepted the advice that the use of a living donor in feline renal transplantation was not acceptable, but that use of a pre-euthanasia donor gave rise to further questions. Technically, such animals were not dead, so, strictly, their use would be illegal. There were also ethical issues around whether the use of such an animal as a donor would delay its euthanasia, as well as what assurances should be in place around the selection of an animal for donation.

These issues needed to be discussed and resolved before the committee could make any firm recommendations.

‘One solution might be that if post-euthanasia transplantation is the only acceptable way forward, and if that can’t technically be done, then it can’t be done, and we’ll have an outcome,’ said Mr Catlow.

Bradley Viner, the RCVS President, said that views and guidance were being sought from the Council, not a decision at this stage.

Many Council members contributed to the debate. Neil Smith said he was pleased by the recommendation that the use of a living source was not acceptable. He had been disappointed that the Council had passed its original guidance in 2003. Although he was not against the process of transplantation per se, there were many challenges around it, and he was concerned for the welfare of the animal that would be giving up its kidney. He also felt that such animals should not be described as ‘donors’ because they were not making the choice to give up their organ themselves.

Mike Hertridge pointed out that the original guidance in 2005 was designed to protect the donor animal, ensuring that the life of the source animal was maintained. He was concerned that the proposed new guidance was removing the protection for the source animal. He found the idea abhorrent that, for example, an animal with head trauma might be kept alive and be transported around the country...
RCVS Council had to decide whether, if it wanted to progress its guidance on renal transplantation, the College should go down the route of applying to the Home Office for an exemption. If the Council decided that the RCVS should not go down this route, ‘then the matter cannot be progressed in any case’.

Rachel Jennings, a lay member of the Council, suggested that public reaction to any decision about renal transplantation needed to be considered. Was there a demand for the procedure, she asked, and what was the welfare impact on the animal receiving the kidney? There was a risk that the profession might be viewed as performing a procedure that did not have an appreciable positive welfare impact just because it was technically possible.

Kit Sturgess replied that, currently, the evidence around the welfare benefits of Kidney transplantation was equivocal, although there was some suggestion that it did improve longevity and quality of life. He believed that the RCVS should be encouraging research into ‘non-heartbeat’ donation to make this possible, rather than trying to ‘fudge’ the issue of the use of pre-euthanasia animals.

Jerry Davies suggested that the Council should simply rule that all transplantation of tissue was unacceptable unless the donor animal was dead. However, a number of Council members pointed out that this could affect procedures such as blood transfusions, artificial insemination and embryo transfer.

Summing up, Mr Catlow said that the Council’s concerns about pre-euthanasia donation were very clear and he was confident that the concerns raised by the Standards Committee were reflected by the Council. He concluded: ‘I think we are moving to post-euthanasia donation only, and if it’s not feasible then it’s not feasible, so it can’t be done’.

The Standards Committee would consider the comments made by the Council and present further proposals at a later date.

### Governance arrangements for ‘a Royal College that regulates’

A PAPER before the Council proposing reform to the RCVS’s governance represented the culmination of more than two years of work, said Stuart Reid, senior vice-president. Encouraging the Council to endorse the proposals, he said that the reforms set out in the paper had been discussed extensively and were, he believed, ‘appropriate for a Royal College that regulates’. They would also allow for flexibility should changes be required in future.

Under the proposals, the size of the Council would be reduced to a maximum of 25 members, comprising 13 elected members, six appointed lay members, and two veterinary nurses. There would be three members appointed on behalf of the UK veterinary schools. Provision was also made for the appointment of one associate member from among any allied professions that the RCVS might regulate in future.

Professor Reid also drew attention to responses received to Defra’s consultation on proposals to modernise the RCVS Council (VR, November 7, 2015, vol 177, pp 452, 453). These, he said, ‘demonstrate a huge degree of support and unanimity’. He particularly welcomed the BVA’s support for the proposed changes to RCVS governance. It was important that there was a consensus across the profession as a Legislative Reform Order would be needed for the changes to take place.

The Council was asked to approve the proposed model for reform and the transitional arrangements laid out in the paper. It was also asked to support the continued encouragement of Defra ministers to back the reform process.

Andrea Jeffrey commented that the responses to Defra’s consultation had demonstrated a very positive endorsement for the formal representation of veterinary nurses on the RCVS Council. ‘It really would be a historic moment for the profession that we do have formal representation of veterinary nursing on an RCVS Council,’ she said.

Richard Stephenson said that it was ‘inevitable’ that the governance arrangements of the RCVS would have to be a unique arrangement because of its unique role as a Royal College that regulates. ‘We can’t just model on someone else,’ he said. ‘We have to have a bespoke solution.’ He noted that the proposals would reduce the size of the Council by almost 50 per cent, but maintain a majority of elected members to ensure democratic accountability; they would also guarantee representation of veterinary nurses, maintain a close link with the veterinary schools, and guarantee lay membership. They also achieved an element of ‘future proofing’ by allowing for future representation of associate groups. ‘I am entirely happy to support this proposal,’ he said.

Richard Davis, a lay member of the Council, commented that guaranteeing
that a quarter of the Council’s membership would comprise lay members gave the proposals the credibility they would need going forward.

However, Neil Smith was concerned about the reduction in the size of the Council. One of the strengths of the current body was the great diversity of its membership, he said, and reducing the number of elected members to 13 would decrease this diversity and reduce the pool of people from which the President was selected. He was also concerned that, with only three members to be elected each year, once the new arrangements were in place, there was the possibility that particular groups of people with very specific views or interests could be elected and could influence the direction that the RCVS took. ’It’s a lot harder to do if you’re electing six people, but it’s quite easy to do if you’re electing three,’ he said.

 Lynne Hill said that she could understand the concerns about the small numbers, but was pleased that the elected members would still be in the majority in the new-look Council. In general, she was supportive of the changes. She noted that the Chief Veterinary Officer, who traditionally had a place on the Council, would not automatically be a member. She pointed out that the CVO’s membership had proved extremely useful and effective in the past, particularly in situations where contacts in government were useful. How would these contacts be maintained in future? she asked.

 Professor Reid remarked that the present CVO supported the idea of the CVO not having a seat on the Council. There was every intention that the RCVS would maintain a close relationship with government following the reforms.

 Bradley Viner, the RCVS President, said that he hoped the RCVS had reached a point where all parties involved in the reforms were reasonably content.

 The Council supported all the proposals.

**Non-compliance with CPD requirements**

THE RCVS Education Committee had expressed concern about a ‘significant’ level of non-compliance among vets with their CPD requirements, reported Jo Price, chair of the committee.

Last year, as part of an annual audit of vets’ compliance with the required 105 hours of CPD over a rolling three-year period, the RCVS had asked 931 vets to submit their CPD records for 2012 to 2014. Seventy-five per cent of those asked submitted their records and 79 per cent of those were compliant with the requirement. Those who were not compliant would be included in the 2016 audit to check whether they had made up the hours needed.

 Professor Price said that, while the lack of response from 229 vets may seem small in the grand scheme of things, there was still concern about what the next steps should be regarding ensuring compliance. The committee was committed to ensuring that there were ‘more teeth’ around measures for dealing with those who did not comply.

**Alternative dispute resolution**

 Nick Stace, the RCVS chief executive, told the Council that the trial of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system was ongoing. It would be reviewed in June and options for the future would be presented to the Council for decision. He reported that, so far, 91 per cent of the veterinary practitioners who had been through the ADR process felt that it had been a positive experience for them, although only 40 per cent of clients who had been through the process felt that it had been positive. However, 91 per cent of clients felt that it was important that the RCVS had an ADR type system. ’There does seem to be a good level of support for ADR,’ he said.

**Delegation to unqualified lay staff**

 The RCVS Standards Committee had received inquiries about what lay staff could and could not do in practice, said David Catlow, the committee’s chair. It was now developing guidance on delegation to unqualified lay staff. ’It is very important that the profession recognises that unqualified practice staff have no legal dispensation to undertake any medical treatments or surgical procedures,’ he said. ’They do not have the same privileges that Schedule 3 grants to Registered veterinary nurses.’ The only tasks that could be delegated were treatments of the sort that an animal owner would be allowed to do. Decisions on delegating such tasks were a matter for individual professional judgement so, although the committee was drafting general guidance on this issue, it did not feel it was sensible for the College to be listing out what could and could not be done.

**Practice Standards Scheme**

 Jacqui Molyneux, chair of the Practice Standards Group, reported that a four-fold increase had been recorded in the number of new practice applications for the Practice Standards Scheme compared with the same time last year. This followed the launch of the new-look scheme in November.

**Nomination of junior vice-president**

 The Council nominated Stephen May as junior vice-president of the RCVS for 2016/17, pending the outcome of this year’s Council election and subject to approval at the RCVS’s AGM on July 15.

**Updated guidance**

 The RCVS Standards Committee has updated the supporting guidance to the Code of Professional Conduct regarding microchipping, to reflect the forthcoming introduction of compulsory microchipping of dogs in Great Britain in April. It has also reviewed and extended guidance on client confidentiality to cover cases of suspected illegal imports and has updated guidance on veterinary care.

**Committee chairs**

 Susan Dawson, head of Liverpool veterinary school, was elected by the Council as chair of the Education Committee. She replaced Jo Price, who will be leaving the RCVS Council this summer. The Council also reconfirmed David Catlow as chair of the Standards Committee.

**Honours and awards**

 Bradley Viner, the RCVS President, announced that this year’s recipient of the Queen’s Medal would be Randolph Richards. Professor Richards would be presented with the honour during RCVS Day, which is to be held at the Royal Institute of British Architects on July 15. Also during RCVS Day, Honorary Associateship would be conferred on Professor David Lane and Honorary Fellowship by election would be conferred on Professor Martin Hugh-Jones and Ian Wright.
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