

Professional Meeting Focuses on Future of Veterinary Medicine

Agenda for Action: *Veterinary Medicine's Role in Biodefense and Public Health*, a meeting of more than 150 veterinary professionals, focused on several issues of importance to the future role of veterinary medicine.

The meeting, held November 1–3 in Washington, DC, “focused on zoonotic diseases, the role of veterinary medicine in public health, the role of the profession in bioterrorism, and the opportunity to step up to assist the country in this time of need,” says Dean Bennie Osburn.

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Dean Osburn and Dean Emeritus Frederick Murphy were involved in organizing the meeting, which featured presenters from universities, diagnostic laboratories, the pharmaceutical research industry, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Wildlife Research Center, and the Office of Global Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The fourteen presenters spoke about the critical role of veterinarians in control and prevention of emerging diseases; biodefense resources and strategy; recruitment, motivation and instruction in preventive medicine and population health; graduate training and continuing education; veterinary public health (agricultural issues and agroterrorism); human health issues (zoonoses, bioterrorism and emerging diseases); and innovations in disease detection.

Bruno Chomel, professor in population health and reproduction and former director of the school's Master of Preventive Veterinary Medicine (MPVM) degree program, gave a talk on control and prevention of emerging zoonoses. Kent Lloyd, associate dean

for research, Donal Walsh, professor of medicine and epidemiology, veterinary students Danielle Tack ('04) and Beth Whitwell ('05), and several UC Davis alumni also attended the conference.

Recommended actions include development of a national agenda for veterinary medicine; development of future leaders for public health and public veterinary medicine; increased research capacity in the area of diagnostics, vaccines, therapeutics and epidemiology; and continuing education to prepare the profession for emergency response related to biowarfare.

Dr. Osburn says, “The meeting emphasized that the current needs of the country represent the greatest opportunity for veterinary medicine in the next 4–5 decades to understand the genomics and genetics of organisms, improve our ability to diagnose diseases, and improve the ways vaccines are made.”

At least 12 different veterinary colleges already have faculty participating in Regional Centers of Excellence, which focus on improving public health in the face of emerging or introduced diseases, and a number of colleges, including UC Davis, are applying for regional biocontainment laboratories (see page 7).

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Currently the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine is a leader in NIH-funded projects. More than \$1.7 billion in new funding for research and facilities infrastructure will be available next year.

Proceedings of the meeting will be published in the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges' *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education* by early summer. Donal Walsh is editor of the journal.

UC DAVIS LAB CONFIRMS CASE

WEST NILE ENCEPHALITIS VIRUS ARRIVES IN STATE

California's first documented human case of West Nile encephalitis, in Los Angeles, was confirmed last fall—antibody tests were performed at the Davis Arbovirus Research Unit (DARU), which is directed by Dr. Thomas Scott. DARU is a component of the Center for Vectorborne Diseases.

Dr. Scott collaborated with the Department of Health Services' viral laboratory, Los Angeles County's public health laboratory and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's vectorborne disease laboratory in Fort Collins, Colorado.

Other imported human cases were detected in California during 2002, and the West Nile encephalitis virus has been identified in Texas horses—it is likely to be in California horses soon. The Center for Equine Health Web site (www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ceh) has more information about the disease in horses.

ANIMAL HEALTH & FOOD SAFETY

CAHFS LAB DEVELOPS RESOURCE NETWORK

The California Animal Health & Food Safety Laboratory System was selected last July by the USDA as one of 12 veterinary diagnostic laboratories funded to develop the National Animal Health Laboratory Network.

Animal disease surveillance and diagnosis—to safeguard the health and well-being of our nation's livestock and poultry, companion animals, wildlife, zoo and exotic species, and to protect the public from diseases common to animals and humans—will be most effective if publicly funded state animal health laboratories work as partners.

During Great Britain's catastrophic foot and mouth disease outbreak, the number of cases quickly outstripped laboratory resources, which severely compromised the ability of veterinarians to work effectively in the field. Without a network of federal, state and local resources, the U.S. would face the same problem in the event of a similar outbreak.

The need for a national network, able to identify high-risk biological pathogens in food animals or the agricultural system, and respond to any type of animal health emergency, has never been more critical.