2021 2nd Quarterly vetSIG Meeting (April 30th, 2021)

Observer Report

EMWA’s vetSIG held their Q2 meeting on-line on April 30th, 2021 and featured a talk by Louisa Marcombes entitled *Sweet Secrets of Honey in the Air: Anatomy of an evidence-based veterinary medicine report*. This talk was the first in our series of “tasters of veterinary medical communication”. Our definition of “taster” is a talk by a SIG member highlighting a point of interest from their work, and Louisa managed to blend varied interesting points into hers.

Louisa told us her interest in evidence on honey was sparked by discussing an actual (and happily ultimately resolved) case of a wound in a dog with a colleague who casually asker her “*Oh, why didn’t you try honey on the wound*?”. This casual question metamorphosized into a PICO question (P=Population; I=Intervention; C=Comparator; I=Intervention) to form the basis of a search for evidence. The actual PICO question was: *In healthy dogs undergoing open wound management, does the topical application of honey, when compared to wounds treated with daily saline washes only, reduce the time to complete wound healing?* The answer (as researched by Louisa) would become the basis for an article in *Veterinary Evidence*, a journal specializing in knowledge summaries for clinically relevant questions.

Louisa talked us through her search for evidence, and then her evaluation of the evidence found. Her search threw up only three studies in the literature, and these reported studies quickly threw up further problems for her evaluation. Firstly, the studies appeared poorly designed and executed, with data exposed to bias and thus greatly degrading the evidential value. Secondly, it transpired that two of the reports she was evaluating came from the same study: she had found a clear case of duplicate publication! In fact, contacting the journals in question lead to one of these reports being retracted. Thirdly, Louisa highlighted the problem of overclaiming; for example, one article described honey as a “potent” wound-healing agent, a claim not justified by its data or references.

When the topic was thrown open to the floor, many of the initial questions concerned literature searches. Louisa described her use of CAB direct; although this search engine is not free, it is does provide access to a number of useful resources and can pick up on some animal-related areas that PubMed may not always catch. Louisa also emphasized Other members mentioned Livivo.de as a useful search engine. Other questioners were interested in how easy it was to identify a duplicate publication. Louisa also commented that any comprehensive critique of the data involves rechecking statistical comparisons because statistical errors are reportedly commonplace in the veterinary literature. She also mentioned that poor writing quality can really hinder evidence appraisal, which is a very pertinent point for all of us as medical writers.

The discussion took an interesting turn when we learned that Louisa’s research had yielded a podcast as well as journal article. This raised a whole series of questions about Louisa’s podcast and podcasts in medical communication in general. The podcast questions and one question about predatory journals brough the discussion to a close (in fact, the journals in this case were not on any predatory list). Anyone interested to learn more should check out Louisa’s article and podcast (both open access) at the links below.

Article: <https://www.veterinaryevidence.org/index.php/ve/article/view/308>

Podcast: <https://www.veterinaryevidence.org/index.php/ve/article/download/308/595?inline=1>

Louisa’s talk and discussion took up most of the allotted time, and we rolled some of our other planned items (e.g. survey report) to the next meeting. We briefly highlighted a bank of questions for potential discussions, and recommended combining more “tasters" with discussion questions in the SIG’s future Meet-and-Share quarterly meetings.

The main business of the meeting closed with reminders of two vet-related events in the forthcoming EMWA virtual conference. These are Craig Woods’ talk on *Comparative and Translational Medicine: the integration of veterinary and human clinical research* (6:40 pm CEST on Tuesday, May 4th), and the vetSIG seminar *Three views from the field: Two vets and one medical writer discuss animal research, public health, and the veterinary post-mortem* (with Jennifer Freyman, Kilian Unger, and Henry Smith; 3:30 pm CEST on Friday, May 7th).

After the normal meeting closed, we held an extraordinary meeting to confirm positions in the SIG for the coming year, with Cemile Jakupoglu and Henry Smith confirmed as co-chairs, Louisa Marcombes and Jennifer Bell as joint section-editors for the SIG’s section in *Medical Writing*, Miyuki Tauchi, Jennifer Freymann , and Louisa Marcombes as committee members, and Beatrix Doerr, Sandra Götsch-Schmidt, and Karim Montasser as supporting members.

Henry Smith (vetSIG co-chair)