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Responsible prescribing top of the agenda at 2023 AHDA Conference

The Animal Health Distributors Association’s annual conference returned to Birmingham last week after a three-year break, welcoming over 400 Registered Animal Medicines advisors (RAMAs) to the two-day event.

The extensive programme of seminars and workshops covered topics related to management of farm, equine and companion animals. Alongside the extensive speaker programme, over 50 animal health companies, including veterinary medicine manufacturers and suppliers and industry bodies such as AMTRA, COWS, SCOPS and VMD, exhibited their products and services.

In the keynote address on Monday, John Millward, head of the Inspections and Enforcement Division at the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), gave an insight into the upcoming consultation of the new Veterinary Medicines Regulations.

During the past year, AHDA has focussed on a project of work to ‘Enhance Responsible Prescribing’, with the theme for this year’s conference being ‘Working for Positive Change’. The programme on day one included workshops on the topic of responsible prescribing, with AHDA partnering with veterinary medicine manufacturers and SCOPS to deliver interactive workshops for conference delegates on the topic.

This included a closer look at the prescribing process, in association with the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA), customer interactions, faecal egg counting and animal medicine planning.

“The programme on day one was key for AHDA to drive forward the important message of prescribing responsibly,” says Bryan Lovegrove, AHDA Secretary General.

“In raising awareness of the challenges faced by those prescribing animal medicines - particularly anthelmintic resistance - and by focussing on it at this year’s conference, we were able to bring real scenarios to life in the workshops.”

“This encouraged some thoughtful and engaging conversation and will help prescribers to pass this best-practice on to the end users – their customers – so they can better understand the topic.”

Day two of the conference focussed on a range of relevant and current topics in animal health and welfare, with sessions split into ‘Farm Animal’ and ‘Companion Animal & Equine’ presentations.

Key speakers included Rob Howe from LLM Farm Vets who spoke on the environmental impacts of veterinary medicines, and Dr Alison Pyatt from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), who highlighted the current problem of anthelmintic resistance in horses, and the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach, previewing the new CANTER equine group.

Elsewhere, Jonathan Statham, Chairman of the Animal Health and Welfare Board for England, provided an update on the Pathway. Part of the farming reforms set out in the Agricultural Transition Plan, the Pathway is a partnership whereby the government will work together with

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farmers, vets, the wider industry to increase productivity and efficiency, and improve welfare, health, management and husbandry.

“The Pathway is big news for livestock farmers, and will have impacts on prescribing to the cattle and sheep sectors, so we were delighted to welcome Jonathan to the conference,” says Mr Lovegrove.

“The Pathway Scheme was designed with vets in mind, but it will be a challenge to deliver without the support of other prescribers in the industry. Conference delegates were able to learn about the Pathway in more detail, entering dialogue with other industry professionals to help ensure successful delivery of the scheme for livestock producers where animal medicines are concerned,” he added.

The gala dinner, which took place on night one of the conference, provided a platform for the annual AMTRA awards ceremony, where overall winner and recipient of the AHDA Cup was Daniel Male, who also collected the award for top all-species RAMA student.

“It was great to come back together after a lengthy break. The conference was clearly missed by many, and the depth of conversation and engagement over the two days demonstrated strength and ability for the future of the industry,” Mr Lovegrove concludes.

The 2024 AHDA Conference will take place on 22 and 23 January.