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SCA·H·L·S

NEWSLETTER

SUB-COMMITTEE ON ANIMAL HEALTH LABORATORY STANDARDS

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Australian Animal Pathology Standards Program (AAPSP)

The program was launched in February 2006 and the web page is functional on the AHA site (www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au). Visitors can view the range of services on offer and members' pages are password-protected. Current membership includes State government, university and private sector laboratories. The program offers members:

- Proficiency testing in pathology and histotechnology,
- Specialist training through on-line reference materials and modules,
- Continuing education through annual workshops in each state/territory,
- Access to the national registry of domestic animal pathology
- Access to previous Veterinary Pathology Reports and Slide of the Month archives

- On-line second opinion service, and
- Links to useful pathology sites.

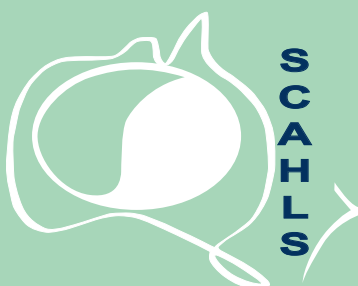
The 2006 round of continuing education workshops on respiratory pathology will be presented by Dr Wanda Haschek-Hock (University of Illinois) on the following dates: Brisbane 6-7 April, Darwin 10-11 April, Sydney 20-21 April, Melbourne 27-28 April, Launceston 1-2 May, Adelaide 4-5 May and Perth 7-8 May. The workshops this year will include a 2-hour session on the diagnosis of avian influenza.

All laboratories are reminded that the National Registry of Domestic Animal Pathology, which is now part of AAPSP and is undergoing refurbishment, is seeking additional case material. Contact Dr Keith Walker at EMAI (keith.walker@dpi.nsw.gov.au)

Syndrome Reporting

Animal Health Committee recently examined a report on preliminary data generated by SCAHLS members under the Syndrome Reporting guidelines, and confirmed its support for the scheme. The data captured diagnostic information in 24 clinical syndromes, for 10 species groups and 7 diagnostic categories. Although based on incomplete data, the preliminary report demonstrated a number of specific aspects of disease surveillance and diagnostic efficiency hitherto unavailable in Australia.

Examples presented in the report illustrated the potential that syndrome reporting has for Australian biosecurity strategies and for laboratory efficiency and effectiveness in the future. When the Syndrome Reporting database contains several years worth of data, the analysis will allow quarterly (or seasonal) figures to be compared to historical data, enabling the identification of trends and abnormalities. Because the data is both temporal and regional, a high degree of analytical capacity is anticipated.



ANQAP Review

Following a SCAHLS commissioned review conducted by Les Sims, SCAHLS discussed and confirmed the following outcomes:

- ANQAP will undertake to review the fee structure, particularly the ratio of fixed participation costs to the cost on a per-test basis, in an attempt to reduce the burden on smaller laboratories.
- ANQAP will seek advice and review the use of statistics in reporting of ANQAP results.
- ANQAP will review a plan that would allow for the purchase and sale of serum samples (and any other such resources).
- SCAHLS determined that ANQAP should not be involved in endorsement and disendorsement of laboratories for particular tests, and that this falls within the remit of NATA. As a result, ANQAP will implement changes to remove reference to “disendorsement” and use the terms satisfactory and unsatisfactory. No punitive action is indicated for “unsatisfactory” outcomes, rather the program will continue to take positive actions to assist laboratories experiencing difficulties.
- ANQAP will look at a business arrangement to enable the inclusion of molecular tests and seek inclusion of new clients in the Plant and Aquatic areas, as steps towards defraying costs.
- ANQAP will undertake a review of tests that all current and potential stakeholders see as beneficial.

WAVLD

In November 2007, Australia will host the biennial international conference of the World Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians. This event will bring together diagnosticians from around the world to present and discuss a wide range of issues that form the core of the work undertaken in veterinary laboratories. One day will be devoted to avian influenza issues and another to OIE matters. Held under the auspices of the Australian Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians (AAVLD) and the Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL), the meeting will be held in Melbourne and co-chaired by Peter Kirkland (President AAVLD) and Martyn Jeggo (Director AAHL). A full scientific program will be developed shortly and contributions requested. Make a note to consider providing a contribution, or at least attending what will be the highlight of the year!!

AAVLD

Following on from the successful meeting last year, another meeting will be held later this year (October/November 2006). The steering committee is currently planning the event and details will be circulated as they become available.

SCAHLs *Guidelines on the Management and Use of Hand Held Tests*

The recent SCAHLS meeting discussed the report of a working group on the topic “What is the SCAHLS’ role in the use and management of pen-site tests, including restrictions on their use, their validation and proficiency testing?” SCAHLS determined that, importantly, the processes for validation of hand held tests should be no different from any laboratory based test. Before a kit can be assessed as fit for any proposed purpose, supporting data must be evaluated. Hence, suppliers of hand held tests who wish their product to be used in Australia should complete a SCAHLS validation template. Hand held tests are generally designed to be conducted by laypersons, and formal proficiency testing is considered impractical.

However, where veterinary agencies propose to use a kit, the competency based training for that role should ensure that operators understand the importance of following the manufacturer’s instructions for use of the kit. This will include adherence to expiry dates, storage requirements and operational instructions; an appreciation of the importance of sample quality or conformance with label requirements for valid use of the kit, and training to keep records relating to the use of the kit for the purposes of ongoing assessment of kit performance. SCAHLS noted that testing for exotic and notifiable diseases is under the control of the responsible veterinary authority in each jurisdiction, and is covered by appropriate regulations.

Laboratory Biosecurity Update

Following a review in 2005, COAG (Council of Australian Governments) has developed a draft set of proposals to manage the terrorist threat to Australia posed by laboratories holding high risk human pathogens. The basis of the approach is a list of human and animal pathogens considered to represent a risk and ways of managing that risk through a series of prescribed activities. Underpinning this approach will be a compliance monitoring body, although the exact format of this has yet to be decided. The Department of Health and Ageing and the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation in conjunction with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet are seeking comments from stakeholders on this approach. A series of meetings was held in Brisbane (4th April), Sydney (5th April), Adelaide (6th April) and Melbourne (7th April). The briefing sessions were open to all involved in laboratory work, but because of the security sensitive nature of the threat assessment briefing, entrance was restricted to registered attendees.

New Test Approval Process

SCAHLS conducted a half-day workshop on the new test approval process following its meeting in March 2006. ANZSDPs contain tests that are recommended for use in Australian and New Zealand Laboratories. A New Test Approval Process was developed to ensure that validation has been adequately conducted and fulfils Australia's and New Zealand's version of the OIE guidelines for "Fitness for Purpose". New tests intended for use in national disease control or eradication programs, for export trade certification, and for exotic disease detection by accredited laboratories, will be the focus of the new process. A policy document and standard operating procedures will soon be published on the SCAHLS website outlining how SCAHLS approval may be achieved. As part of the ongoing review process, tests already included in ANZSDPs may also (over time) be subject to the same approval process.

Approved tests will be highlighted in an ANZSDP as "Approved by SCAHLS for the stated purpose" (and the specific purpose specified).

It was noted during the workshop that there will be costs associated with the approval process and, for this reason, an application for SCAHLS approval will be subject to a fee.