

Veterinary Times
Olympus House
Werrington Centre
Peterborough
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28th December 2007

Open Letter

Dear Editor,

I have only recently received a copy of the Veterinary Times in which there was a report by Harry Waddle entitled "PFMA: Vet School funding is "ethical"". As one of the speakers I was disappointed to realise this appeared to be the sole coverage by the VT of the historic AVA Pet Food debate at Cambridge University in November.

I found the article to be not only very unrepresentative of the debate as a whole but certainly pandered to the power of the PFMA by reporting their lies seemingly without any attempt at investigative journalism or by giving any of us who made accusations an opportunity to support our position.

Contrary to the report and the PFMA rebuttals there is very strong evidence of Pet Food manufacturers striving to control what students are taught in a very biased manner. The fact that the majority of students who spoke at the debate certainly did not feel they had the teaching that would give them sufficient confidence to advise owners on a non-commercial food diet says it all about their knowledge base on this subject.

In the contract between Waltham and Edinburgh Vet School in the 1990s obtained through the FIA there are the following clauses

"Within the Undergraduate Curriculum, the use of Speakers, Written Material and Promotional Visits from other prepared pet food manufacturers will be discussed with the Company prior to any arrangements being made." (their capitals and underlining, not mine – presumably PP had a veto on these guest speakers etc)

"Pedigree Petfoods' products will be used exclusively in the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, including the Referral and "First Opinion" Clinics. This will not only apply to the Pedigree and Whiskas Clinical Diets, but to the "core" brands such as Pedigree Chum, Pedigree Chum Formula, Chappie and Whiskas ranges." Of course students will tend to loyally stick with what they learn at Uni regarding brands etc at University thereby increasing sales of these brands in practice once qualified.

With regard to waiting and reception room merchandising ...

"Pedigree Petfoods to advise on appropriate product ranges and fixture layout; to arrange product supply and continuity; and to liaise with the Veterinary Faculty to arrange comprehensive and effective training

Edinburgh to commit staff to the principles of retailing and to establish Pet Health Counsellors at the hospital

Some basic principles of Practice Communication and Management to be taught to veterinary

Students by utilising these facilities in an informal way.”

In other words PP will teach the university staff to sell their products and then get them to teach the students in such a way as the students don't realise how they are being brainwashed/programmed to sell Pedigree Petfood products in future.

Although the overall AVS debate was carried in favour of the motion there was a very definite swing away from trusting commercial pet food diets in the before and after votes which is significant but was withheld from being reported to the rest of the profession both by the VT and Veterinary Record.

There was no reporting on the duality of the position taken by the speakers in favour of commercial pet food. For example, on one hand they tried to impress upon the students the importance of the research that has gone into formulating these diets with respect to them being 100% balanced, but as soon as one student made the point that she wouldn't like to eat the same boring formula day in and day out they immediately changed their stance by saying that pet food manufacturers don't advocate only feeding their products. It isn't possible to have it both ways – either the formulae are carefully researched to be 100% balanced and provide everything required nutritionally or they are intended to be fed alongside other foods which completely negates the whole idea of providing 100% balanced food in a bag.

The pro-motion speakers also made a point of saying how much advance has been made by manufacturers on rabbit nutrition thereby advocating commercial rabbit feeds. However Tom Harcourt-Brown's speech was quite brilliant at clearly stating why nearly all rabbit disease seen in clinical practice is due to incorrect feeding and how commercial rabbit feeds are not appropriate in any way. Of course any investigative journalism would also have revealed and reported that the PFMA tried to suppress the rabbit nutrition aspect of the debate for this reason.

I could go on but one of the main points of this letter is that those of us who have rumbled the dangers of commercial pet foods and are prepared to stand up and be counted are frequently criticised for not opening up discussions through the veterinary press and through open debate such as the AVS one held at Cambridge. If however the Veterinary Press is not prepared to honestly, openly and rigourously cover the topic it is no surprise that there are accusations of conspiracy and cover-up by the profession and the vet press to hide the facts from the public that commercial pet food is largely responsible for many of the diseases seen in our pets.

Sincerely,

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