

PFMA: VET SCHOOL FUNDING FROM INDUSTRY IS 'ETHICAL'

report by

Harry Waddle

harrywaddle@vbd.uk.com

Veterinary students have questioned the influence that pet food manufacturers may have on university teaching, and urged lecturers to give them a full and in-depth knowledge of pet nutrition.

During an Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) debate at the University of Cambridge, students claimed that they were not given the full picture on pet nutrition, and queried whether education was being sacrificed due to the influence of pet food manufacturers.

Particularly under the microscope was veterinary schools' sponsorship from private companies, and any influence those companies might have.

Students at the debate were quick to point out that they were not given the opportunity to learn about a natural diet, and questioned whether that could be as a result of pet food manufacturers' influence.

Veterinary student James-Patrick Crilly asserted that pet food manufacturers must not be allowed exclusive access to veterinary nutrition teaching, in order to prevent a "dangerous monopoly", which could undermine the free market approach to improving the quality of diets.

Lorna Brokenshire went a step further and argued that pet food companies should not be able to sponsor nutrition lectures. She said vets should be educated, informed and freethinking.

However, Fiona Jacob pointed out that a number of pet food manufacturers had representatives at Cambridge. Having previously been one, she said she had not been pressured to advocate any single product and insisted that the course had given her the skills and knowledge required to advise a home-made diet if

required.

A university spokesman was keen to quash any claims of bias. She explained: “The veterinary school’s courses provide balanced, scientifically based lectures on animal nutrition.”

And she added: “All courses go through rigorous reviews, both internally and externally, to ensure the curriculum meets the exacting standards set by Cambridge as well as other accrediting bodies. Pet food manufacturers have absolutely no influence on what is taught.”

Nicole Harrison, from the Pet Food Manufacturers Association (PFMA), also refuted any inference that pet food companies had input into the syllabus taught to the students.

She did, however, confirm that universities received sponsorship, funding and lectures from a number of organisations, including pet food manufacturers, but insisted that the education process ensured this was done in a fair and ethical way.

Ms Harrison said: “Pet food companies may contribute by providing additional lectures and learning materials, such as text books. The additional lectures include nutrition teaching, both basic and clinical, and a presentation of nutrition research.”

She went on: “Students are also informed about brands so that when they go into practice, they are familiar with the products available on the market and can discuss nutrition with pet owners to help them make an informed choice.”

Mr Harrison concluded: “By helping to educate and support the veterinary profession, industry can contribute on the widest scale to improvements for animal health and welfare.”

The RCVS revealed that there was no legislation preventing a private company from having any influence on veterinary education; a spokesman explained that although the course must meet day one competencies, how that knowledge was delivered remained the responsibility of the university.

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