

The SQP: Licensed, Regulated and Trained

Suitable qualified people (SQP) are a profession of animal medicine prescribers, licensed to prescribe a range of veterinary medicines that do not require a veterinary diagnosis. Typically these medicines are for endo- and ectoparasites for farm livestock, cats, dogs and horses. With over 6500 SQPs on the register, sales account for 25% of the UK animal medicines market from the prescription only medicine – veterinarian, pharmacist, SQP (POM-VPS), or non-food animal – vet, pharmacist, SQP (NFA-VPS) classification as governed by the VMD

Licensed. In 2002, EU animal medicines legislation required all animal medicines to be prescribed either by a vet, pharmacist or qualified person. From this the SQP qualification was designed and a regulator appointed by VMD to oversee the profession – the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA). All SQPs have to take and pass an examination which is the equivalent of a first-year university degree course, delivered by agricultural universities and colleges around the UK under the jurisdiction of Harper Adams University. Typically the two-hour exam will include a viva and requires a project to be completed from case studies and related topics. Learning is a mixture of online and lectures, and previously qualified prescribers were all required to sit an upgrade exam. SQPs are broken down into three main categories with 'R' SQPs licensed to prescribe all medicines, 'C' to prescribe for companion animals only, and 'E' for equine only. Additionally, specialist modules are available, such as avian and bees.

Regulated. SQPs have to adhere to a strict code of practice which includes a disciplinary and appeals procedure, as well as overseeing the examination process. Many prescriptions take place in over-the-counter premises, scattered right across the UK, reaching remote rural communities with delivery and collection services. Each sale has to be physically supervised by an SQP on-site, requiring a minimum of two, and up to four SQPs per registered premises. The VMD inspects premises using their inspectorate team and can seize product or close premises down for major infringement. Medicines must be correctly stored and vaccines refrigerated with a proper stock rotation, and full records kept of batch numbers. Over 700 SQPs now work in veterinary premises offering a valuable front-of-house prescribing and dispensing service.

A typical agricultural merchant premises will sell a wide range of livestock and arable farming requisites, including feed, supplements, grassland products, livestock handling and care equipment, seeds, agrochemicals, rodenticides, dairy hygiene, fencing and clothing. SQPs are expected to provide advice on all aspects of animal health and many will be owners of animals themselves.

Trained. Training or continuous professional development (CPD) is a compulsory part of an SQP qualification. SQPs need to attain a set number of training points using a mixture of attended lectures, online webinar training and reading materials. Points are accrued over a two-year period and, if targets are not met, SQPs have to elect to re-take a costly exam or are taken off the register. Through AHDA (The



Animal Health Distributors Association), SQPs are members of Moredun Institute and the SQP is represented on working bodies such as SCOPS, SHAWG, CHAWG, RUMA and COWS.

The SQP and the Veterinary Profession. Rarely has such a headline caused such debate, as relationships vary considerably across the country. On the one hand, the BVA and FVE in Europe have an open position statement insisting that all animal medicines should only be prescribed by a vet. Inevitably this causes friction between the two professions and AHDA sits in the middle, both defending the existence of the SQP but also trying to encourage both parties to work together for the benefit of animal health. Commercial rivalry exists as livestock farmers try to drive down prices of medicines and enjoy the free advice of an SQP, who is not allowed under any circumstances to make diagnosis. Anthelmintic resistance, fluke management strategies, lameness, scab and fly control products all enter the mix between advice, competition and the correct prescription, which often goes against long-held traditional buying patterns, particularly with farmers. Generic brands create more choice but more price pressure, whilst the large companion animal market for flea and wormer products suffer greatly from internet promotions and the separation of the customer from first-hand face-to-face advice. The SQP has made a valuable contribution to raising awareness of anthelmintic resistance, particularly in sheep and horses with worm egg-counting laboratory results a key part of an SQP portfolio. One example, led by AHDA, of encouraging local vet and SQP businesses to work more closely has been to set up bi-monthly meetings to discuss regional health issues. SQPs are encouraged to use the WEC service at the vets as a means to offer customers a rapid results service. Further recent examples of both professions working together has been the drawing up of prescribing protocols for sheep and horses to ensure sufficient questioning takes place about resistance before prescribing using both BEVA and SVS, with these protocols available to both vets and SQPs. To find out more about our industry, please consider attending our annual showcase conference on 19/20th January 2016 at the NEC Birmingham; full details are online at www.ahda.co.uk.



Ian Scott is Secretary General of Animal Health Distributors Association (AHDA) and has held the post for nine years. AHDA members represent over 90% of the value of the market and AHDA is active in both UK and Europe, defending the rights of its members to prescribe animal medicines.
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□ 'Think twice before prescribing anthelmintics' *



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