Advancing thinking in veterinary epidemiology and preventive medicine

MORE than 225 scientists and policymakers gathered in Dublin recently for the annual conference of the Society for Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (SVEPM). Held at Dublin Castle from March 26 to 28, under the presidency of Kristien Verheyen of the Royal Veterinary College, the meeting attracted delegates from 25 countries, primarily from Europe but also from North and South America, the Middle East, Asia and Australasia. The local organisers were Simon More and Daniel Collins from the Centre for Veterinary Epidemiology and Risk Analysis at University College Dublin.

The SVEPM was founded in 1982 and brings together scientists and policymakers, particularly within Europe, with the common aim to advance thinking in veterinary epidemiology and preventive medicine.

The scientific programme at this year’s meeting included an opening and closing plenary lecture, plus a further 21 presentations in a range of themed sessions, including bovine mastitis, drug resistance, emerging infections, cattle health management, novel approaches, animal contact structures, bovine TB and bee health management. The opening plenary talk, entitled ‘Confessions of a wannabe Bayesian’, was given by Nils Toft from the Technical University of Denmark and focused on the use of Bayesian models in diagnostic test evaluation, in particular in the absence of a gold standard. The closing plenary, the Gareth Davies Lecture, was delivered by Ian Gardner from the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada. In his talk, entitled ‘Bridging the gap in infectious disease epidemiology between aquatic and terrestrial food animals: challenges and future opportunities’, Professor Gardner spoke of the opportunities for epidemiological research in aquatic animal systems, including outbreak investigation, studies on pathogen transfer between wild and farmed stocks, and issues relating to population decline.

In addition to the main scientific sessions, there were a number of workshops, on subjects including ‘getting the most out of the conference’, spatial analysis, aquatic animal epidemiology, qualitative methods, multilevel modelling, exotic disease incursion and animal health, and greenhouse gas emission intensity. Over 90 posters were displayed during the conference, and poster tours were arranged allowing authors to present a brief outline of their projects in groups. This was an important aspect of the conference as it allowed many students to present their studies to epidemiologists outside of their research group for the first time.

A number of social events were organised for delegates, introducing them to some of the most popular tourist attractions in Dublin. A preconference student dinner was held in Temple Bar; delegates visited the Book of Kells and the Old Library at Trinity College Dublin; and the gala dinner and ceilí took place in the Guinness Storehouse. In addition, some delegates visited Glendalough and undertook a hillwalk in the surrounding mountains.

The next SVEPM conference will be held in Ghent, Belgium, from March 25 to 27, 2015. Details will become available at www.svepm.org.uk later this year.

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