

Scientist condemns 'excessive' vaccination

PROFESSOR Richard Lacey, one of the scientists who exposed the BSE problem, has lent his weight to the campaign against what is considered to be excessive canine vaccination.

Although not vigorously against an initial vaccination, Professor Lacey considers that routine repetitive vaccinations are unnecessary and harmful and that the manufacturers are without proper control.

He has added his voice to those of the Canine Health Census (CHC) campaign, led by Catherine O'Driscoll, which is seeking to protect dogs from what it considers can be a harmful practice.

Professor Lacey, who served on the Ministry of Agriculture Veterinary Products Committee (VPC) between 1986-89, said: "The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and the VPC are reliant upon data supplied from the manufacturers themselves. But no one makes them supply that information.

"It is my belief that serious side-effects are far greater than the number reported. There is no proper monitoring system, no independent check and there should be."

Only vaccine manufacturers are able to test vaccines, he said, which meant that if there are any problems, no one but them need know about them.

"What I would like to see is a benefits versus side effects discussion. I have witnesses to the side effects," he said.

"We vaccinate dogs a lot, cats a bit but don't vaccinate guinea pigs, rabbits and fish at all. Why are dogs bearing the brunt of this? The diseases they are vaccinated against are not that serious and not that common.

"There are three different bodies who have a direct financial interest in maintaining the status quo — kennel owners, vets and vaccine manufacturers.

"I have nothing against one effective vaccination, what I object to is vaccinations every two or three years. There is no evidence that more is needed. In humans, blood tests are done to see if a further vaccination is needed. Why don't we do this for dogs?"

He confirmed that bovine products are used in vaccine manufacture which, he said, "could certainly pose a risk of cross-species spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)".

"Once again, the vaccine industry goes unchecked in this respect," he said. "All pharmaceutical companies providing material for human use have been instructed since 1989 not to use bovine material where BSE is prevalent but this is not a legal requirement, it is only advisory."

Professor Lacey believes that once immunity to a virus exists, it generally exists for the animal's lifetime. "Vets and kennels are demanding that pets are vaccinated unnecessarily," he said, "and the owners are being fleeced. The veteri-

primary profession and the vaccine manufacturers should be subject to adequate external monitoring."

His comments follow the release of the CHC's interim vaccine survey findings which claim that a high percentage of dogs become ill within three months of vaccination.

"Vaccines are decimating the dog population," said Miss O'Driscoll. "It is time the veterinary profession took notice of the evidence on a medical rather than financial basis. Professor Lacey is one of the most eminent scientists in the world — we should surely listen to him.

"We urge dog lovers to inform themselves where vaccines are concerned, and think seriously before putting their dogs' lives at risk with unnecessary and costly annual vaccinations."

A spokesman for the National Office of Animal Health said that millions of doses of pet vaccines were used in the UK alone. "Thanks principally to that, the incidence of killer disease, such as canine parvovirus, has been reduced to a level previously undreamt of," she said.

The manufacture of animal health products in Europe, including veterinary vaccines, was one of the most strictly regulated industries in the world, she said. Before a vaccine is allowed on the market, the manufacturer must demonstrate to the authorities that the product meets stringent European criteria on safety, quality and efficacy in accordance with European Community directives. Data in support of UK licence applications are peer reviewed by scientific experts at the VMD and its independent

expert advisory committee the Veterinary Products Committee. In addition, once authorised, products are subject to periodic monitoring and review.

"Facilities for vaccine manufacture, whether in the UK or abroad, need to comply with strict criteria and are thoroughly inspected in accordance with legal requirements by the authorities before the vaccine may be sold in the UK," she said.

"Every single batch of a vaccine must meet these specific standards. Individual batches are subject to stringent and demanding monitoring and testing.

"As with human vaccines, the authorities have set guidelines to control the source of any substance of bovine origin in the manufacture of veterinary vaccines. These guidelines have been followed by veterinary vaccine manufacturers, therefore dog owners can have confidence in the safety of vaccines.

"There are established procedures for vets to report any suspected adverse reactions (SARs) to the VMD and they are actively encouraged by manufacturers and the VMD to do this. The VMD's Suspected Adverse Reaction Surveillance System provides an independent check on all reported SARs and publishes periodic summaries.

"The immunity provided by vaccination peaks and then gradually falls. An animal runs the risk of suffering disease if this immunity is not 'topped up'. The booster vaccine 'tops up' the immune system, reminding it how to respond should it encounter disease."