

South African Vaccine Producers



Managing director: Mrs Megan Saffer

South African Vaccine Producers (SAVP) is the only South African manufacturer of antivenom for the treatment of snake, scorpion and spider bites. Wonderful feedback has been received on antivenoms used from as far afield as Riverbanks Zoo USA, to a successfully treated well known local ornithologist for a Boomslang envenomation.

SAVP was represented at the World Health Organization workshop on production, control and regulation of antivenoms, held in Ethiopia. The workshop highlighted the unscrupulous marketing of inappropriate antivenoms to African countries, the consequences of which include avoidable deaths and the misuse of scarce budget resources. In most parts of the world, snakebites are under or unreported. This deficiency in surveillance explains why the impact of this important public health problem has remained for so long unrecognized and neglected. The recommendation is for venomous snake bites to become a notifiable condition.

Animal unit

The SAVP animal unit supplies specified pathogen-free animals for use within the NHLS/SAVP as per animal ethics clearance. It is also a major supplier of animals to other research organisations. The animal usage for routine testing within NHLS/SAVP had remained constant throughout the year, in line with reduction, refinement and replacement principles. Only one new research project was approved by the NHLS animal ethics committee and one extension was granted to a current protocol and thus the animal usage for research had declined. Sales to outside institutions remained constant but with an increase in demand for guinea pigs to the National Control Laboratories in Bloemfontein.

The head of the animal unit, Miss Pauline Hawkins, was invited to attend the Institute of Animal Technologists (IAT) congress which was held at the Aviemore conference centre in Scotland. It was an informative congress with topics ranging from the new laws pertaining to the problem of animal rights movements, to the breeding and husbandry of the Zebra Fish, which is now commonly used for genetic studies and toxicity testing. The IAT launched the newly formatted electronic course for the teaching of animal technologists which had been outsourced to service providers around the UK.

Whilst in the UK Miss Hawkins took the opportunity to visit some of the service providers offering the newly formatted IAT courses in laboratory animal technology. For South Africa this was going to be the way forward in training animal technologists as all attempts to initiate a course in South Africa had failed due to the low numbers of students per annum. On her return, the information was tabled at the South African Association for Laboratory Science (SAALAS) executive committee meeting for discussion. The service provider who could provide the best service to South African students was chosen. Miss Hawkins has helped write the new modules for South African Law and the health and safety modules. She has also written the standards for registration of the courses with the South African Qualifications Authority.

The new national code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes has been published by the South African Bureau of Standards. This code will be used to help legislate the use of animals used for scientific research and safety testing of products. With the emphasis on trained personnel working with laboratory animals, SAVP animal unit had the first students in South Africa to register on the IAT course. All six students have successfully completed and passed the first two modules. The staff have all enjoyed studying and learning the theory behind the work they do every day. It has given the unit a positive outlook on the future.

Miss Hawkins ran a one-day workshop on behalf of SAALAS on anaesthesiology and pain management which was attended by 48 delegates from around the country.