ETHICAL AGENTS
VETERINARY MARKETING

EA News

June 2025

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Geof Roberts 1937-2025

Geof Roberts was Auckland born and bred, attending Auckland Grammar School and Seddon Tech where he studied management and participated in athletics.

As a boy he helped manufacture tablets and pessaries in his father's pharmacy, which would have been a help in his later career.

From there, he later became a pharmacy rep then a veterinary detailer for AM Satterthwaite & Co, progressing into management.

This was the beginning of the veterinary pharmaceutical industry as we now know it as AM Satterthwaite & Co, at that time represented the major companies such as Boehringer and Pfizer.

When those companies got big enough to go it alone Geof farmed out some agencies to people like old friend Don McLaren, the founder of BOMAC and he himself co-purchased Norton Griffith, a veterinary wholesaler. He concurrently set up Ethical Agents as an agency company run by his wife, Jeanette.

Upon the death of his partner in Norton Griffith he sold that company to Steven's Pharmaceuticals and concentrated on developing Ethical Agents, which he moved to the current site in Wiri.

Always up with the times the company was computerized before that became commonplace and Geof was responsible for launching the first parvo virus vaccine in New Zealand, from Pittman-Moore.

A dedicated family man he married Jeanette in 1960. Greg came along in 1962 and Louise some time later.

Both spent time in the company; Greg eventually purchasing it from his father in 2001.

Away from work Geof's hobbies were offshore powerboat racing and cars. In the 60's offshore racing was big and Geof was very enthusiastic, actually setting a record run from Auckland to Paihia that stood for many years. But cars were his big passion, owning upwards of 70 collectibles during his life, including 26 different Jaguars.

Geof devoted much of his time to Jaycees and served many years in leading positions in Rotary. In those roles he was passionate about Trees for Survival and was involved in possum eradication on Rangitoto.

Professionally he had three golden rules that he drilled into his reps: never disparage the opposition, never park in clinic clients' parking places and never intrude if another company rep was talking.

The company is now fully owned by Greg and his wife Joanne; their children, John and Kate, play leading roles, as does John's wife Courtney.

However Geof was still involved well into his 80s, often taking grandson John to do the lifting when delivering cat litter. On one occasion he used his precious Jaguar but parked down the road.

When John asked why he replied that, if the client saw the Jaguar, he would probably not get any more orders.

Unfortunately, Geof battled illness in the last few months and passed away in hospice care in the early hours of June 6.

He is survived by his wife Jeanette, children Greg and Louise, grandchildren John and Kate and great-grandsons Liam and Ollie.

Inside this issue:

Corporatization of the Profession

Increasing corporatization of the profession does have pitfalls, as seen in a recent BBC news article. Some vets are being put under "consistent pressure" to generate income, the BBC has been told, with one vet claiming, "Your worth is only how much income you bring." He says the amount of money he brings in is one of his key performance indicators.

The BBC spoke to seven vets working for IVC Evidensia (which is owned by a private equity firm). IVC owns more than 900 surgeries, who all say they are monitored and set targets by the company. The vets, who wanted to remain anonymous, had responded to a recent survey by the British Veterinary Union (BVU). (Source: BBC File on 4 Investigates, April 15 2025)

In 2013, only 10% of vet practices in the UK were owned by large corporate groups. Now that figure stands at 60%. Bills for pet owners have risen as corporate ownership has increased - by more than 60% between 2015 and 2023, figures from the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) show. This is almost double the rate of inflation or the increase in vet salaries over that time.

Vets are being encouraged to compete against other practices owned by IVC over the number of certain procedures they carry out on animals, through what the company calls "clinical challenge milestones".

Practices monitor the average amount per animal a vet generates across all their consultations and vets feel that they need to upsell to pet owners. The BBC has seen emails from the corporate to a practice urging vets to carry out a certain number of specific procedures on pets. There are gold, silver and bronze target "milestones" to aim for.

Staff are told about drop-in sessions where they can share what the corporate describes as "tips and tricks" with colleagues on how to reach their targets and are told they'll get constant updates on their progress."

A graph charts how your practice compares to your area and the whole of IVC", one vet says. "Seeing this is already intimidating if you are below the line. I felt chastised for not bringing in enough money."

In emails seen by the BBC, this vet is asked to explain why his "average transaction value" is "very low" and his use of a certain procedure is also "very low".

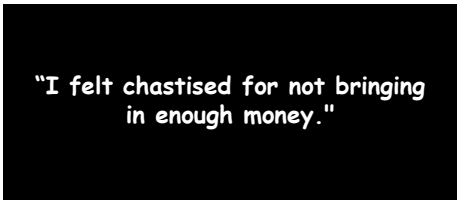
"The income is the thing by which you are monitored," the vet says. "You start thinking about how much you charge [per consultation] ... what you can add."

IVC- also owns the UK's largest emergency out-of-hours service, called Vets Now. A vet who works there, says she and her colleagues have been given similar targets, and offered prizes for hitting them. She claims the company's approach sometimes interferes in clinical decisions and makes it harder for vets to propose treatments based on pet owners' budgets.

Another vet working for the out-of-hours service told the BBC its call centre regularly booked emergency appointments with her for animals with non-urgent symptoms, costing pet owners more than £300. "I'd say 30% to 50% of cases could wait to be seen in the morning," says the vet.

The BVU says the sector has become more profit-driven since non-vets were allowed to take over practices in 1999. One of the vets the BBC spoke to says he believes IVC's main goal is making money for the venture capitalists behind the company.

The BBC did give IVC a right of reply and they predictably stated that



the health and welfare of animals is always its first priority and that the best interests of pets are of paramount importance. It says that clinical autonomy is a core tenet of its business and that all the 8,000 vets and vet nurses working for the company have clinical freedom to recommend appropriate care, considering each animal's needs and the owner's circumstances. The company says challenges were also introduced to ensure care-level consistency across all its practices.

The CMA, basically similar to our Commerce Commission is currently investigating concerns about corporations buying hundreds of independent vet practices, pushing up prices and making potentially excessive profits. It is expected to deliver provisional recommendations in July.

Could such a scenario happen here? Of course it can. Already the veterinary pharmaceutical world is dominated by multinational corporates to the detriment of many NZ owned family businesses and now the major wholesalers have all been taken over by overseas corporate companies.

In addition, many practices throughout the country have been corporatized with mostly non-veterinarians as practice managers.

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Corporatization of the Profession

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Like everything, this situation has plusses and minuses, particularly for the veterinarians themselves.

In the early years of the century many older veterinarians were looking to exit the profession but had difficulty with succession plans. This was due to several factors, not the least of which was the fact that younger clinicians were still burdened by student debt and, already with house mortgages, were not in a position to commit to buying practice shares.

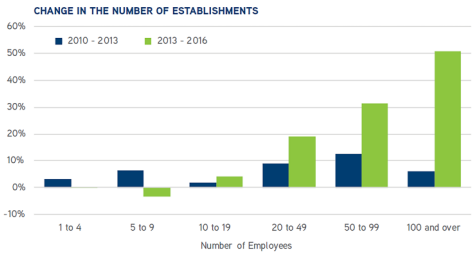
Corporate buy in solved a lot of these issues for many older practitioners, with the downside being that there was not only no incentive but also very limited opportunity for working clinicians to be able to buy into a practice.

Now, in the 2020s there is such a shortage of clinicians in the country that corporates are no longer in a position to buy out sole practitioners, so the issue of succession is now back to square one.

But the bigger issues with corporatization are as outlined above in the BBC article.

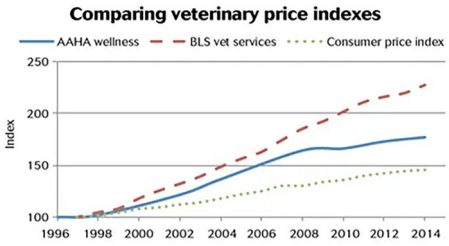
There is huge potential for the dollar to drive treatment and prescribing. Non veterinarian managers have the potential to drive prescribing habits of qualified clinicians

A few years ago, the myth was that “It is always dearer at the vet’s”; competition with farm shops has helped to change that erroneous perception.



The challenge now for corporate practices is to not get fixated on profit above all, leading to both client and clinician dissatisfaction.

The 2018 AVMA report noted the stark increase in the number of employees per practice, reflecting the consolidation of the profession as it became more corporatized.



The same report noted the just as dramatic rise in veterinary costs relative to the consumer price index.

Whilst it is not possible to say whether these two trends are related, it does leave a lot of room for speculation.

The Wedding

At a wedding ceremony the pastor asked if anyone had anything to say concerning the union of the bride and groom, as it was their time to stand up and talk, or forever hold their peace.

The moment of utter silence was broken by a young beautiful woman carrying a child.

She started walking toward the pastor slowly. Everything quickly turned to chaos.

The bride slapped the groom. The groom's mother fainted.

The groomsmen started giving each other looks and wondering how best to help save the situation.

Flustered, the pastor asked the woman, "Can you tell us why you came forward?".

The young woman replied, "We can't hear at the back."

Arithmetic

Nagy went to a job interview. The interviewer noted that he had put on his CV that he was very quick at mental arithmetic.

"What's nineteen multiplied by seventeen?" the interviewer asked.

Quick as a flash Nagy replied, "Thirty-four."

"That's wrong," the interviewer said.

"But it was very quick," Nagy pointed out

NSAIDs in Dairy Medicine

With the massive increase in animal welfare issues, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) have flourished in recent decades to be widely used not only in small animal medicine but in farm animals as well. While many different drugs have been marketed across species some are still utilised almost exclusively in small animals or horses but there are four common ones that have had value in cattle medicine.

These are, in alphabetical order, flunixin, ketoprofen, meloxicam and tolfenamic acid. Some of these have been subject to heavy marketing but, by having all available, EA is in a position to evaluate them dispassionately.

Thanks to the marketing both ketoprofen and meloxicam have been in and out as 'flavour of the month' for dairy practices over the last couple of decades. However, when we look at other species such as dogs and humans, we see that there is no 'one size fits all approach'; instead, different NSAIDs are prescribed for different indications. For example, Ibuprofen is commonly used to treat mild-to-moderate pain, inflammation, and fever in humans. On the other hand, Mefenamic Acid is typically used for more severe types of pain. Commonly, the latter is used on pain associated with menstrual cramps, as it is believed to be more suited for this purpose

The Boring Stuff:

Based on structure, most NSAIDs can be divided into three broad groups: carboxylic acid and enolic acid derivatives, and the COX-2 inhibitors. Carboxylic acid subgroups include the salicylates (aspirin), propionic acids (ibuprofen, naproxen, carprofen, ketoprofen, etc), fenemates (tolfenamic and meclofenamic acids), phenylacetic acids (acetaminophen), and aminonicotinic acids (flunixin). The main subgroups of enolic acids are the pyrazolones (phenylbutazone) and the oxicams (meloxicam, piroxicam).

The newer coxib class of selective COX-2 inhibitors has burgeoned in recent decades with a checkered track record in human medicine and a plethora of members entering the veterinary field-[1] but these are little used in cattle medicine.

"both ketoprofen and meloxicam have been in and out as 'flavour of the month' for dairy practices"

What this means in simpler language is that aminonicotinic acid and anthranilic acid (the basis of fenemates) are structurally similar, both being aromatic acids with an amine group and a carboxylic acid group, which basically means that flunixin and tolfenamic acid are chemically quite similar and have similar actions, whereas ketoprofen is different and meloxicam different again.

The Properties:

All NSAIDs are analgesic, anti-inflammatory and anti-pyretic but they vary in the degree to which they exhibit these properties. There is also considerable species variation for each particular chemical. It is this variation that that means that different NSAIDs suit different situations.

Flunixin: As well as being first alphabetically flunixin is the oldest of these four veterinary wise. Its major property is extremely rapid onset of action and that, coupled with very strong soft tissue pain relief made it particularly effective in equine colic. It is also widely used in Europe for acute mastitis in cattle and is an ideal early pain reliever for surgical interventions such as caesarean section in cattle.-[2], or Just ask any equine clinician regarding the extremely effective soft tissue pain relief in horses, an animal that does not do pain very well. It has no milk withholding time in New Zealand.

The one big feature of flunixin is that, although extremely rapid in action, it is also of quite short duration with a terminal half-life of 5.4 hours.-[3] This contrasts with meloxicam which has a much longer duration of action but also very slow onset. The T_{max} (time to peak levels) for meloxicam is 6 hours-[4] so that, even if given pre-intervention it may not be fully effective when the local wears off. This is important as, when local anaesthetic wears off, there is a rebound pain sensation.-[5] Having analgesia already in place will nullify that. In small animal medicine the gold standard is opiates peri-operation and NSAIDs post-operation, the NSAID kicking in when the opiate wears off.

This multi-modal analgesia, common in small animal medicine, can be replicated in dairy cattle with the rapid onset flunixin taking the place of the opiate. With the main analgesia during the operation being lignocaine which takes a little time to wear off, unlike the gaseous anaesthesia in small animal surgery, there is no to need give pre-operation thus obviating any opiate need. Follow up with a slower onset, longer acting NSAID such as meloxicam would result in a high level of analgesia post operation.

Ketoprofen: Probably the next oldest compound and definitely next on the list alphabetically is the propionic acid derivative, ketoprofen. When ketoprofen first hit the mar-

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NSAIDs in Dairy Medicine

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ket some decades ago it was extremely popular. This popularity waned over time with the development of newer chemicals but it has seen a resurgence in recent years because, although action is mainly limited to 24 hours, it has zero milk withhold.

In actual fact the half-life of ketoprofen is only 2.7 hours-[6] This is actually shorter than flunixin! Science Direct lists the half-life in cattle as 0.42 hours, making is less attractive as a pre-emptive anaesthetic, i.e. not suitable for the use suggested above for flunixin.

In addition, although ketoprofen can be used to effectively manage postoperative pain, there may be a propensity for postoperative haemorrhage.-[7]

When ketoprofen was first introduced, the dosing was designed to be the same millilitres as flunixin meglumine; however, that dosage was not always effective.-[8] Clever end user marketing to farmers, including a focus on lameness helped drive demand.

Meloxicam: Meloxicam is actually quite an old molecule that sat on a shelf for many years before its attributes were realised. With a terminal half-life of 17 hours, it has a much longer duration of activity than either flunixin or ketoprofen. Until the resurgence of ketoprofen in recent years meloxicam held pride of place in the dairy world, thanks also to very good marketing.

A considerable amount of good trial work showed the benefits of meloxicam in alleviating several conditions resulting in improved life parameters such as milk yield and reproduction. A good example of such work is the very recent work by Mason and Laidlaw.-[9]

This work typically showed the down the track benefits, i.e. reproductive gains in lame cattle even though "Meloxicam at the time of lameness treatment was not associated with a reduced time to soundness", this was explained by speculating that lameness score may not be sensitive enough to assess response to lameness treatment.

While a lot of this work over the years has been measuring production benefits such as reproduction and milk yield after meloxicam administration to cattle with painful conditions it is quite logical to extrapolate the findings to other NSAIDs, i.e. it is the reduced inflammatory response coupled with the ensuing pain relief that aids recovery.

Tolfenamic Acid: Tolfenamic acid covers all bases. As a fenemate it is closely related in structure to flunixin and possesses the same rapid onset of activity.

It has a terminal half-life in cattle of 15 hours, similar to meloxicam but this length of activity is boosted by two other pharmacological phenomena, entero-hepatic recirculation and flip-flop kinetics (the latter only applies if injected i/m).-[10.-11]

Tolfenamic acid also has strong analgesic properties, being used in human medicine as a treatment for migraines, under the trade name Clotam.

Drug	T_{max}	½ Life	Admin	Milk WHP
Flunixin	15-30 minutes	5.4 hours	i/v	0
Ketoprofen	30-60 minutes	2.7 hours	i/v, i/m	0
Meloxicam	6 hours	17 hours	i/v, i/m	84 hours
Tolfenamic Acid	30 minutes	15 hours	i/v, i/m	0

Summary – Where Do They Fit In?

As we have seen above, it has been well established that pain relief does aid recovery and, especially in the case of dairy cattle, return to full production must be an important parameter in assessing the cost of treatment; welfare may be the driving force but it makes economic sense as well.

The table below summarizes the kinetic features of the four NSAIDS. While choice may be arbitrary, or dictated by accountants trying to rationalise product range, there are grounds for clinicians choosing different NSAIDs for different situations.

Although some flunixin products do have an 'on label' i/m dose the molecule is still highly irritant to tissue so that i/v dosing is still the preferred option. This really limits flunixin to being a tool for the professional, i.e. the veterinarian. Its high level of visceral pain analgesia, and rapid onset of activity make it ideal to use immediately post operation, before local analgesia has worn off. Follow up by the farmer can be with a longer acting product such as meloxicam or tolfenamic acid but, from a practice marketing point of view, it would certainly be beneficial to have a specialised i/v analgesic utilised by the clinician.

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Gratitude

A man was leaving the hospital and, when shaking the doctor's hand, said "I would not insult you by offering you money but I would like you to know that I have mentioned you in my will."

The doctor replied. "That prescription I gave you. Could I have it back so I can make a slight adjustment?"

NSAIDs in Dairy Medicine

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On the other hand, ketoprofen, by virtue of the zero milk withhold and common i/m administration, would appear to be an appropriate NSAID to leave for farmer use, particularly for lame cows where no antibiotic is used.

Generics have brought the price down and ketoprofen could fill a similar role to that of paracetamol in humans, to keep on hand for moderate pain with other NSAID options kept for the medical professional, i.e. the veterinary clinician.

Of those options, meloxicam has proved popular over the years having originally been developed by a multinational company.

It is a very effective molecule but the slow onset of activity and the long milk withhold are limiting factors.

The latter, of course, does not matter if other treatment requiring milk withhold is administered concurrently and the longer duration of activity could, depending on the situation, conceivably mean one injection would suffice without follow up.

Also, as stated above with multimodal analgesia, meloxicam would prolong analgesia after flunixin itself fell below effective levels, generally 24 hours at the most.

Tolfenamic acid, with its rapid onset, long duration, especially if given i/m, and zero milk withhold would appear to cover all bases. Perhaps its major weakness was that, when first developed, it was by a company that at that time was not a multinational corporate with the finance to splash out on R&D and marketing.

Conclusion

Each will have its advocates and all four of these NSAIDs are extremely useful adjuncts to therapy in dairy cattle. A practice will most likely not carry all four but a strong case can be made to have more than one option available to clinicians. Circumstances alter cases!

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Last Request

An Englishman, Irishman, Welshman, Scotsman were captured while fighting in a far-off foreign land.

The leader of the captors said, 'We're going to line you up in front of a firing squad and shoot you all in turn. But first, you each can make a final wish.'

The Englishman responds, 'I'd like to hear "God Save The Queen" just one more time to remind me of the auld country, played by the London All Boys Choir. With Morris Dancers Dancing to the tune.'

The Irishman replies, 'I'd like to hear "Danny Boy" just one more time to remind me of the auld country, sung in the style of Daniel O'Donnell, with Riverdance dancers skipping gaily to the tune.'

The Welshman answers, 'I'd like to hear "Men Of Harlech" just one more time to remind me of the country, sung as if by the Treorchy Male Voice Choir.'

The Scotsman says quickly, 'I'd like to be the first one shot.'

Takeaways - Ian Lean

The keynote speaker for the dairy SIB at the recent NZVA Conference was Australasia's foremost dairy nutritionist, Ian Lean. Here are some takeaways:

The lactating cow performs at a level similar to an Olympic athlete. They both require two to three times more energy and protein than is required for maintenance to perform at their peak.

In the past, there has been a tendency to look at metabolic systems in isolation. However, it is now clear that all metabolic processes are intricately linked to such a degree that now reproductive failure is considered a metabolic disease.

Some nutritional interventions applied for approximately three weeks pre-calving produce positive production responses over an entire lactation. At parturition, there is a sudden increase in the cow's calcium requirements that is nearly 10 times the amount circulating in plasma at any time.

For every case of milk fever there may be eight or more cases of subclinical hypocalcaemia. Hypocalcaemia is often referred to as a 'gateway' disease with many potential flow-on effects that increase the risk of other diseases. Thus, hypocalcaemia and milk fever are risk factors for reproductive disorders and are an indirect risk factor for increased culling.

"Herd treatment with long term calcium salts or boluses is detrimental. Oral calcium should be selective, i.e. target the animals requiring it."

Reducing DCAD reduces the risk of milk fever, however macronutrients also affect risk.

Calcium influences hypocalcaemia independent of DCAD. Increased magnesium intake plays a protective role in hypocalcaemia independent of DCAD. Increased dietary phosphorus increases the risk of milk fever independent of DCAD.

Milk production is increased by use of negative DCAD pre-calving diets. The increase extends well into lactation. Any decrease in DCAD will reduce milk fever risk even when 0 mEq/kg DM is not achieved.

Metabolic challenges to NZ dairy include high DCAD pasture, a Jersey population, feeding factors and winter calving.

His most telling comments came regarding the use of oral calcium supplementation in the transition animal.

Herd treatment with long term calcium salts or boluses is detrimental. Oral calcium should be selective, i.e. target the animals requiring it.

This is exactly what we have been advising with Calol for over 30 years! If a 200 cow herd has 4% milk fever the farmer will know which 8 cows to target, older, high producers and history.

For time poor farmers it is easier to administer than boluses and is more appropriate for clinical or subclinical cases.

For further reading this reference is readily downloadable: Lean IJ, DeGaris P. Transition Cow Management: A Technical Review for Nutritional Professionals, Veterinarians and Farm Advisers. Dairy Australia,

Calol—DCAD in a bottle

Romantic Gift

A man wanted Valentine's Day to be special, so he bought a bottle of absinthe and stopped by the florist's to order a bouquet of his wife's favorite flower: white anemones.

Unfortunately, the florist was sold out of flowers and had only a few stems of feathery ferns.

The man asked the florist to make a bouquet out of the ferns and the flask of liquor.

He added a card and proceeded home.

After a romantic candlelight dinner, he presented his wife with the gift.

She opened the card to read, "Absinthe makes the heart grow fonder."

With a tear in her eye, she whispered to him lovingly, "Yes, and with fronds like these, who needs anemones."

The Pearly Gates

A minister dies and is waiting in line at the Pearly Gates. Ahead of him is a man who's dressed in sunglasses, a loud shirt, leather jacket, and jeans.

Saint Peter addresses this guy, "Who are you, so that I may know whether or not to admit you to the Kingdom of Heaven?"

The man replies, "I'm Joey Shasta, retired airline pilot."

Saint Peter consults his list. He smiles and says to the pilot, "Take this silken robe and golden staff and enter the Kingdom."

The pilot goes into Heaven with his robe and staff.

Next it's the minister's turn. He stands erect and booms out, "I am Joseph Snow, pastor of Saint Mary's for the last 43 years."

Saint Peter consults his list. He says to the minister, "Take this cotton robe and wooden staff and enter the Kingdom."

"Just a minute," says the minister. "That man was a pilot and he gets a silken robe and golden staff. I am an ordained minister. How can this be?"

"Up here, we work by results," says Saint Peter.

"While you preached, people slept; while he flew, people prayed."

Calol—DCAD in a bottle