



The ECVP Certificate in Forensic Veterinary Pathology

Introduction, Basic Information

During the past decade interest in, and demand for, high quality forensic investigations related to unexplained or suspicious incidents involving companion, farm and free-living animals, has risen dramatically. Historically, this demand has often been met by veterinarians who, for the most part, have little or no training in forensic pathology or medicine. Consequently, the standard of reports to prosecuting authorities is extremely variable. The authorities and Courts are in the unenviable position of having no formal way to determine whether the case has been examined by a suitably qualified veterinarian. Such lack of quality control has the potential to result in some reports failing to provide the standard of evidence required by Courts to reach a science based informed opinion.

The ECVP, as the internationally recognised accrediting body of the veterinary pathology specialisation in Europe, has realised the need for a defined qualification of veterinary pathologists in this specific field, as a tool to provide and ensure quality controlled professional services to the society.

Types of investigations

Forensic veterinary pathology is a wide discipline. It covers diverse areas such as:

- Animal abuse including non-accidental injury, physical abuse and neglect,
- Combined agency investigation of domestic violence,
- Contravention of regulations related to transport of injured or sick livestock,
- Misuse and abuse of insecticides,
- Accidental poisoning such as carbon monoxide incidents,
- Investigations of poaching of wildlife,
- Unlawful killing of wildlife including contravention of close season for hunting,
- Incidents of animal suffering caused by inappropriate or inexpertly performed slaughter/killing of animals, in contravention of the legislation,
- Possession of protected species,
- Supporting evidence of animal deaths in homicide cases and drug related incidents,
- Firearms investigations involving danger to human life.

Aims of the ECVP Certificate in Forensic Veterinary Pathology

The Certificate is planned as proof of the certificate holder's competence in the conduct of forensic pathology investigations involving entire animals or samples from animals (e.g. cattle feet in lameness cases, tissue samples related to estimation of duration of suffering or time since injury). The Certificate will be a valuable tool in ensuring that certified forensic veterinary pathologists carry out investigation at a minimum standard for the court. In this way the ECVP will be instrumental in establishing suitable standards in forensic veterinary pathology.

The CFVP Steering Group

The aim of the ECVP is to establish a recognised Europe-wide qualification in forensic veterinary pathology. The Steering Group will ensure that this will be based on an agreed set of standards that acknowledges the diversity of the judicial systems in Europe whilst incorporating those core elements of forensic pathology investigations that underpin sound investigatory, documentary, and reporting procedures.

The Steering Group is composed of a group of European veterinary pathologists who are experienced and active in forensic pathology, with a publication track record in the field. It acts as an independent expert body to scrutinise reports submitted by candidates for the CFVP, in order to provide assessment and feedback that should allow candidates to write future reports which incorporate all the essential features.

The Steering Group is formed by representatives from differing countries, traditions, attitudes to animal welfare and legal systems throughout Europe. To ensure a cohesive and workable committee, the number of members is restricted to six. In line with common practice, the members are expected to serve for 5 years and can be re-elected for a further term. ECVP members who have gained the Certificate in Forensic Veterinary Pathology will be eligible to fill vacancies in the Steering Group as these occur.

Composition of the Steering Group:

Ranald Munro (Chairperson): formerly Professor of Forensic Veterinary Pathology, Royal Veterinary College, London, UK

Andrea Gröne: Department of Pathobiology, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Utrecht University, The Netherlands

Udo Hetzel: Institute of Veterinary Pathology, Vetsuisse Faculty, University of Zurich, Switzerland

Henrik Elvang Jensen: Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

Orlando Paciello: Faculty of Veterinary Sciences, University of Naples, Italy

Lorenzo Ressel (Representative of the CFVP Steering Group in the ECVP Education Committee): Department of Veterinary Pathology and Public Health, Institute of Veterinary Science, University of Liverpool, UK.

Eligibility

The Certificate is currently open to active members (Diplomates) of the ECVP with at least two years post diploma experience in diagnostic pathology. As such, pathologists wishing to gain the Certificate will have the necessary knowledge and experience in veterinary pathology. The thrust of the certificate's assessment will focus on the completeness, openness, interpretation of the pathology findings and the objectiveness/helpfulness of the written report to the authorities/courts. The Certificate will take into consideration legally important concepts such as the use of Standard Operating Procedures for sample-handling, and systems to ensure maintenance of the chain of custody as well as the use of photographic documentation. Other aspects that will be assessed are appropriate use of supporting evidence provided by other experts to complement the report such as diagnostic imaging, and other external scientific disciplines such as forensic entomology, DNA analysis, ballistics, toxicology and other laboratory testing.

Assessment: Case reports and presentation

The main elements of the assessment are (a) scrutiny of 10 reports of actual cases investigated by the candidate (Case Portfolio) and (b) presentation of a selected case at a case discussion meeting (Round Table Discussion; physically linked to the Annual ECV/ESVP Congress). The assessment of each Case Portfolio will be undertaken by two members of the aforementioned Steering Group.

The reports (a) will be from cases examined on behalf of police, animal welfare organisations, prosecuting authorities and lawyers, or upon a specific request for a “forensic report” from other relevant public or private organisations. The case presentation (b) will be based on the material, such as the actual report including photographs, from an individual case. It should also provide an account of the background to the case followed by a summary of the pathological findings, interpretation of the findings and an explanation for the conclusions given in a manner understandable to a non-veterinarian e.g. prosecutor or judge. Examples of templates are available to the candidates, but a specific format is not requested.

The case reports and presentations will be fully anonymised by the candidate to maintain confidentiality. They will be openly discussed with the Steering Group in a round table discussion, as a means to receive feedback and, when needed, advice on best practice.

Re-certification

For re-certification (every 5 years), a minimum of 5 cases should be submitted for review.

Second round of application

Application is now open for the second round of certification. **The deadline of application is the 28nd of February 2021.** For further information, see the [ECVP Website](#) and the Application Guidelines and Application form (password: 3CvPC7vP%)

Forensic pathology training sessions

The ECV is committed to provide continuing education also in forensic veterinary pathology. Therefore, Forensic Veterinary Pathology is now a regular one-day training module in the ECV/ESVP Summer School; so far the module has been delivered twice, in 2015 and 2019. The next module is planned for 2023. The module provides an introduction to the field, it is addressed at postgraduate trainees, but attendance is open to any pathologist interested in embarking on work in the field.

In addition, the ECV plans to establish regular sessions in Veterinary Forensic Pathology during the annual conferences. These are intended as a tool for those working in the field to keep up-to-date with research in the field and to discuss common practice. They can also be used by pathologists who want to become familiar with the field and might be interested in obtaining the CFVP at a later stage.

Prof. Laura Peña

ECVP President

November 2020