

The ECVP/ESVP Summer School in Veterinary Pathology: High-Standard, Structured Training for Young Veterinary Pathologists

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ABSTRACT

This article describes the ECVP/ESVP Summer School in Veterinary Pathology, a new annual two-week European training facility established by the European College of Veterinary Pathologists (ECVP) in collaboration with the European Society of Veterinary Pathology (ESVP). The aim of the Summer Schools is to provide Europe-wide, harmonized, top-standard theoretical and practical post-graduate training for veterinarians specializing in veterinary pathology. In particular, it aims to support trainees in veterinary pathology in their individual preparation for the ECVP certifying examination. Ultimately, it aims to provide young pathologists with the skills and knowledge necessary to participate in international, high-quality research and the tools for applying international standards to their own research and for independent study for the ECVP certifying examination, even if they do not work in comparable academic environments and do not have the same level of local support and training. The ECVP/ESVP Summer Schools take place in European countries, with local organization from a university department of veterinary pathology. Each event comprises modules provided by internationally recognized specialists in their specific fields of expertise on different organ systems, diseases of specific species, specific techniques, and specific topics relevant to pathology, forming a cycle of four events to cover all major topics. Every two years a mock exam is organized as a tool to monitor individual progress in preparing for the ECVP certifying examination.

Key words: veterinary pathology; post-graduate research training; ECVP examination preparation; four-year cycle of events

INTRODUCTION

Veterinary pathologists play a key role in the health and welfare of both people and animals. They contribute vital expertise to a wide range of fields, particularly the monitoring of animal health and welfare, the diagnosis of new emerging diseases, food safety, animal models for human diseases, and the discovery and development of new drugs for treatment of animal and human diseases. Their contribution is increasingly requested in wildlife conservation and epidemiological studies, as well as in studies on wildlife as indicators of environmental health.

In the past, however, the European standard of veterinary pathology research was not harmonized. Careers developed only within national reference frameworks, and there was an obvious lack of consistency and comparability among individual pre-existing training programs, resulting in an uneven level of training of researchers in the field. Consequently, the number of candidates who registered for the globally recognized, high-standard Europe-wide qualifying examination established by the European College of Veterinary Pathology (ECVP) in 1999 to provide a harmonized European quality-assurance scheme was low.¹ At the same time, the worldwide dearth of experienced veterinary pathologists places severe constraints on scientific programs in both academia and industry and jeopardizes personal resources in national and private diagnostic laboratories.²

Addressing these issues, the ECVP and the European Society of Veterinary Pathology (ESVP) decided to establish high-standards training courses offering structured post-graduate training for veterinarians in core skills and the latest research techniques in veterinary pathology. The aims of these courses were (1) to establish a harmonized Europe-wide high-standards research training in veterinary pathology; (2) to substantially increase the number of highly qualified veterinary pathologists working in biomedical research, and (3) to create a Europe-wide network and promote international collaboration among researchers in the discipline.

THE ECVP/ESVP EDUCATION COMMITTEE

In 2001, the ECVP/ESVP Education Committee (EC) began investigating the possibility of establishing a low-budget, Europe-wide training program for veterinarians aiming for a career in veterinary pathology and planning to sit the ECVP certifying examination. The EC is a joint committee of the ECVP (the organization of European veterinary pathologists with admission limited by examination, part of the European Board of Veterinary Specialisation [EBVS]) and the ESVP (the organization facilitating contact between veterinary pathologists throughout the European Union, in EU candidate and associated states, and outside the EU), who together represent European pathologists from academia and the pharmaceutical industry as well as from state

and private research and diagnostic laboratories. The EC currently consists of six honorary delegates from both academia and industry. All members are internationally respected experts in their field with a proven record in training residents and PhD students in veterinary pathology. They are part of an international network, promoting and facilitating communication and collaborations in the discipline. Several members of the EC are also ECVF Council or ESVP Committee members, ensuring cooperation and exchange between these two institutions. The head of the pathology department in the veterinary school hosting each year's event (the local organizer) is also a delegate. The EC developed and established the ECVF/ESVP Summer Schools in Veterinary Pathology (SSVP), the first of which took place in 2003, and is responsible for their overall organization and management and for the choice of and coordination with the speakers. The financial responsibility resides with the ECVF, supported by the ESVP.

GOALS AND STRUCTURE OF THE ECVF/ESVP SUMMER SCHOOLS IN VETERINARY PATHOLOGY

The main goal of the SSVP is to provide training in two major areas. Scientifically, it aims to provide both core training in general and veterinary pathology and training in problem-solving skills and the interpretation and critical appraisal of scientific results. Technically, it aims to provide an introduction to and training in novel research techniques and relevant research topics. This twofold goal is achieved by assembling a program comprising modules on the pathology of the major organ systems and of the most relevant species (small and large domestic animals, avian species, reptiles, non-human primates, zoo and wild animals, fish and marine mammals); modules on general and clinical pathology; and specific sessions on molecular mechanisms of disease and modern techniques in biomedical research, with special emphasis on pathology, genetically engineered animals, animal models, and emerging infectious diseases, complemented by sessions on problem solving (comprehensive pathology) (see Table 1).

The SSVP operates in cycles of four annual two-week events, each representing an individual training unit composed of several independent modules; over four years, these form a complete training program covering all relevant facets of theoretical knowledge and technical expertise required from a veterinary pathologist. Each module consists of high-standard theoretical lectures and practical training sessions (predominantly gross and histological specimens) in equal proportions, both complemented by self-assessment, discussions, and feedback from lecturers, who are experienced, internationally acknowledged experts in the topics they lecture on. The lecturers work in academia and in state laboratories or for pharmaceutical companies, and the vast majority are veterinary pathologists certified by the ECVF or the American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP).

Organ-specific modules cover the major organ systems, and each includes relevant information on species-specific alterations, developmental and genetic diseases, and general pathology. Species-specific modules (e.g., avian, primates, reptiles) are complemented by specific aspects of physiology, anatomy, and histology. General pathology

modules (e.g., carcinogenesis, inflammation) deal mainly with molecular aspects of pathogenesis. Technical modules (e.g., cytology, ultrastructural pathology, molecular techniques) cover both methodological and interpretative aspects. Modules on comprehensive pathology and on problem solving provide training on scientific approaches to analyzing data and publications, as well as covering complementary skills such as the preparation of scientific manuscripts and experimental designs.

The SSVPs are taught entirely in English, which is considered the international language of the scientific community and is the language in which the ECVF certifying examination is given. Lecturers are required to address an audience with highly variable levels of experience, ranging from those who have just started their training to those with several years' experience in the field. In some cases, trainees have had no opportunity to undergo any formal training in their country, and the language barrier is often a challenge, particularly because the majority of trainees are not native English speakers. Care is taken to ensure that lecturers use the "ECVP Examination Style" in providing descriptions and diagnoses of gross and histological specimens, so that participants can make use of the material in their individual preparation for the ECVF certifying examination.

Prior to each SSVP, lecturers provide reading lists for their modules, which are forwarded to the participants for their preparation. For the event itself, a handbook is prepared with background information and outlines of the lectures to allow participants to take notes. Afterwards, the EC compiles a CD, which contains the lecture files and any additional information considered useful for the trainees in their individual review and preparation for the ECVF certifying examination.

For most modules, histology slide sets are made available by the lecturers. These are forwarded to all participants for review after the event. In the future, they will be assembled into a growing slide collection, which the EC will manage and make available for individuals for their private study.

MOCK EXAMINATIONS

Every second year, two days of the SSVP are dedicated to a mock examination, with a shortened version (50%) of the ECVF certifying examination on the first day, followed by thorough revision and discussion on the second day. The mock examination is prepared by an international group of veterinary pathologists (the Mock Exam Committee) who have successfully completed the ECVF certifying examination within the last few years, under the guidance of an ex-member of the ECVF Examination Committee, who ensures that the mock examination accurately mimics the real one. Participation is voluntary and anonymous for the trainees, who have the option of having their papers marked by the Mock Exam Committee and can critically appraise and improve their results based on the answers provided during the revision session. This exercise has two main goals: first, it allows participants to monitor their training progress and, for those who aim to sit the next certifying examination, to evaluate their knowledge and amend their methods of review and preparation if necessary; and, second, it is a useful tool for the EC and the ECVF/ESVP

Table 1: Program and lecturers, ECVP/ESVP Summer Schools in Veterinary Pathology 2003–2006

Year	Module	Time	Lecturer(s)	
2003	Technical Introduction	½ day	F. Nguyen (PhD, Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France)	
	Liver	3 days	T. van den Ingh (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Utrecht, The Netherlands) U. Deschl (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Boehringer Ingelheim Pharma KG, Germany)	
	Skin	3 days	M. Suter (Prof., PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ACVP, Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland) M. Welle (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland) P. Roccabianca (PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Milan, Italy)	
	Poultry	2 days	J. Abadie (PhD, Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France) F. Nguyen (PhD, Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France) M. Wyers (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France)	
	Cytology	1 day	B. Hauser (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; VetSuisse Faculty Zurich, Switzerland) M. Caniatti (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Milan, Italy)	
	Ultrastructural Pathology	1 day	P. Detilleux (PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ACVP, Dipl. ECVP; Aventis Pharma, France) R. Ducatelle (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Gent, Belgium)	
	Carcinogenesis	½ day	A. Gruber (Prof., PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; School of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Germany)	
	2004	Gastrointestinal Tract	2 days	R. Lindberg (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Uppsala, Sweden) A. Pospischil (Prof. Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Zurich, Switzerland)
Respiratory Tract		1½ days	T. van den Ingh (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Utrecht, The Netherlands)	
Nervous System		2 days	W. Baumgärtner (Prof., PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; School of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Germany) M. Pumarola (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Barcelona, Spain) M. Vandevelde (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland)	
Skeletal System		½ day	S. Weisbrode (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Ohio State University, USA)	
Reptiles		1 day	U. Hetzel (Dr.med.vet., Dr.rer.nat.; University of Giessen, Germany) F. Origi (Dr.med.vet.; University of Milan, Italy) N. Robert (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ACVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland)	
Primates		1 day	F.J. Kaup (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; German Primate Center, Tübingen, Germany)	
Inflammation		½ day	B. Car (PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Bristol-Myers Squibb, USA)	
Mock exam		1½ days	A. Gröne (PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ACVP, Dipl. ECVP; School of Veterinary Medicine Hannover, Germany) and colleagues	
Mock exam revision		½ day		
2005		Urinary Tract	2 days	F. Ehrensperger (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Zurich, Switzerland) M. Hilbe (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Zurich, Switzerland)
		Reproductive Tract	1 day	T. Rosol (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Ohio State University, USA) L. Peña Fernandez (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Madrid, Spain) B. Biolatti (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Turin, Italy)
	Endocrine System	1 day	T. Rosol (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Ohio State University, USA)	
	Haemolymphatic System	1 day	H. Harleman (Prof., Dr.med.vet.; Novartis Pharma AG, Switzerland) F. Kuper (Dr.med.vet.; TNO, The Netherlands)	
	Zoo and Wild Animals	1 day	R. Montali (PhD, Dipl. ACVP; University of California, Davis, USA)	
	Fish	1 day	H. Ferguson (PhD, Dipl. ACVP, FRCPath; University of Stirling, UK) H. Schmidt (Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland) P. Trygve (Prof., PhD, DVM; Norwegian College of Veterinary Medicine, Norway)	
	Marine Mammals	½ day	M. Domingo (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Barcelona, Spain)	

Continued

Table 1: Continued

Year	Module	Time	Lecturer(s)
	Clinical Pathology	2 days	M. Jackson (Prof., PhD, Dipl.ACVP; University of Saskatchewan, Canada)
	Molecular Pathology	1 day	L. Bargelloni (Prof., Dr.rer.nat.; University of Padua, Italy)
2006	Eye	1½ days	R. Dubielzig (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; University of Wisconsin, USA)
	Muscular System	1 day	Y. Cherel (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France)
	Cardiovascular System	½ day	J. van Vleet (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Purdue University, USA)
	Animal Models	1 day	M. Castagnaro (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ECVP; University of Padua, Italy)
	Basics of Toxicological Pathology	1 day	W. Haschek-Hock (Prof., PhD, Dipl. ACVP; University of Illinois, USA)
	Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases	1 day	M. Bennett (Prof., PhD, FRCPath, Dipl.ECVP; University of Liverpool, UK) A. Kipar (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; University of Liverpool, UK)
	Genetically Engineered Mice	1 day	G. Cantor (PhD, Dipl. ACVP; Bristol-Myers Squibb, USA)
	Comprehensive Pathology	2 days	H. Posthaus (PhD, Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; Vetsuisse Faculty Berne, Switzerland)
	Mock exam	1 day	M. Wyers (Prof., Dr.med.vet., Dipl. ECVP; National Veterinary School of Nantes, France) and colleagues
	Mock exam revision	1 day	

to monitor the efficiency and success of the SSVPs, particularly with respect to the provision of a harmonized basic knowledge and approach to the subject of veterinary pathology.

Thus far, two mock examinations have been organized, during the 2004 and 2006 SSVPs, and both were very well received by participants, who commented on their particular usefulness in preparation for the real examination and as a help in gaining a realistic view on the level of individual preparation required for the examination.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

The SSVPs are set up as low-budget events, in order to allow the participation of as many trainees as possible from any country and in any position; trainees are often under strong financial constraints. The first two events, in 2003 and 2004, were supported by the ECVP, which in 2004 also offered sponsorship to some participants. As a result of a successful application under the Sixth Framework Programme on Research, Technological Development and Demonstration, financial support was obtained for a series of four events (2005–2008) by a Marie Curie Actions Grant from the European Commission.³ The grant allows the organizers to financially support 70 participants who are pathologists who are early in their careers, have no post-graduate qualification in veterinary pathology, and have worked in the field for less than 10 years. Such support covers travel and living expenses, so that only a small registration fee (currently €400) has to be requested from each participant.

In 2006, the ESVP also provided a grant covering the registration fees to some participants.

The Marie Curie Actions Grant also allows the EC to employ a part-time secretary, who is responsible for the administration of the grant, EC events, and all pre- and post-event meetings of the EC, as well as providing a small amount of financial support to the organizers themselves. Therefore, both ECVP and ESVP still carry the financial responsibility for the SSVPs and must subsidize a large portion of the event. Accordingly, financial support from corporate sponsors is essential to ensure that the SSVP can be organized successfully, particularly if the Marie Curie Actions Grant cannot be renewed.

PARTICIPANTS

The number of participants and the number of countries they come from have increased over time. In 2003, the SSVP was attended by 54 veterinarians from 12 European countries (see Figure 1). In 2004, the number of participants increased to 79 from 16 countries (see Figure 1), including two each from Iran and South Africa. In 2005, the 81 participants came from 23 countries (see Figure 1), including one participant each from Canada, Israel, South Africa, and the United States, and in 2006, the 83 participants came from 21 countries (see Figure 1), including two from Japan and one from South Africa. Whereas, in the first two years, no more than two participants came from an Eastern European country (Serbia and Montenegro; Slovenia), the number attending from this region has increased each year, to five and seven in 2005 and 2006 respectively (see Figure 1). This increase is likely due to the spread of information about the

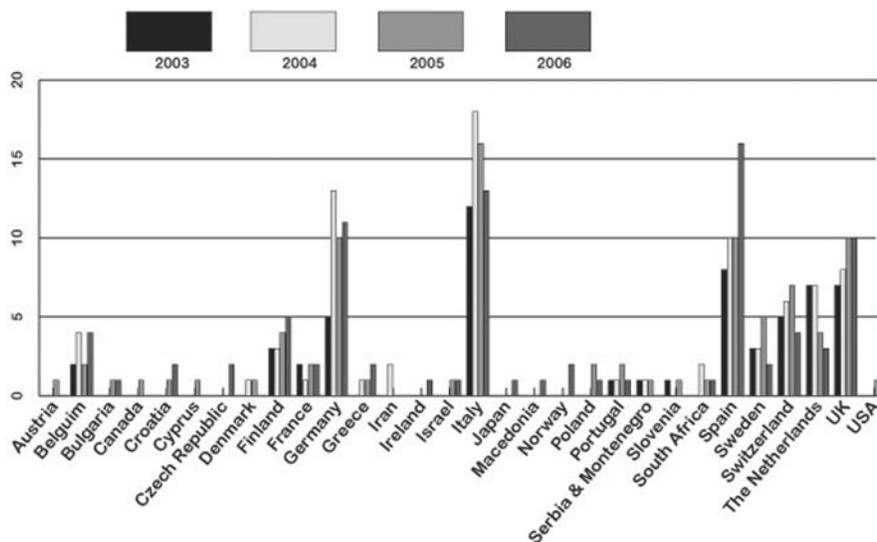


Figure 1: Country of origin of participants, ECV/ESVP Summer Schools 2003–2006.

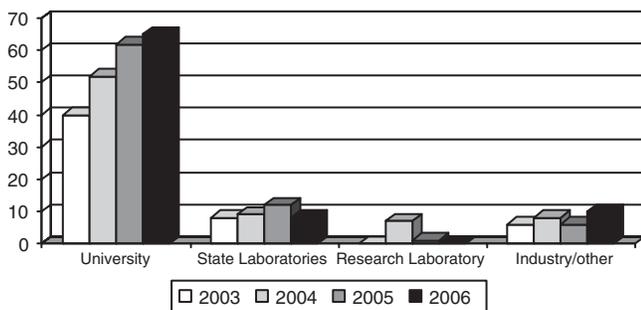


Figure 2: Place of work of participants, ECV/ESVP Summer Schools 2003–2006.

events over time—particularly at the 2004 annual meeting of the ESVP, held in Olsztyn, Poland—and, even more likely, also because of the financial support offered by the Marie Curie Actions Grant in 2005 and 2006, supplemented in 2006 by additional grants from the ESVP and corporate sponsors.

Participants are veterinarians training or working in the field of veterinary pathology. They nonetheless have highly variable backgrounds with respect to their country of origin, their working background or scientific environment, and their level of experience. While some have little practical work experience, others have a substantial amount, both in diagnostic aspects of veterinary pathology and in research. The majority of participants come from universities (74% in 2003; 68% in 2004; 77% in 2005; 78% in 2006), but there are also participants from state laboratories (diagnostic laboratories or laboratories with a strong diagnostic emphasis: 15% in 2003; 12% in 2004; 15% in 2005; 10% in 2006); research laboratories (9% in 2004; 1% in 2005); and pharmaceutical companies (11% in 2003 and 2004; 7% in 2005; 12% in 2006) (see Figure 2). The female-to-male ratio has progressed from 56%:44% in 2003 through 62%:38% in 2004 and 63%:37% in 2005 to 67%:33% in 2006, obviously increasingly reflecting

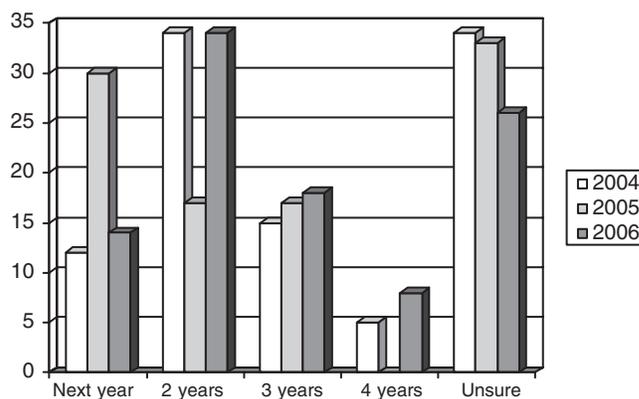


Figure 3: Plans of participants of the ECV/ESVP Summer Schools 2004–2006 to sit the ECVP certifying examination.

the ratio among veterinary undergraduate students and in the veterinary profession in Europe.^{4, 5}

Most participants are undergoing post-graduate training and seek to sit the ECVP (or ACVP) certifying examination; they generally consider the SSVPs a vital component of their individual preparation. The ECVP certifying examination requires an acceptable, supervised training period of at least three years, directed by a diplomate of the ECVP or ACVP, or, alternatively, a five-year training period accepted and approved by the ECVP Council.⁶ Numerous participants have joined several, mostly consecutive, SSVPs (two events: 50; three events: 19; four events: 12), and the number of participants aiming to sit the examination in the following years obviously reflects their stage of training. The percentage of trainees as yet undecided on when (and whether) to take the examination is dropping (26% in 2006), but very likely still reflects the relatively high number of institutions throughout Europe that do not offer any training to prepare young pathologists for the ECVP certifying examination (see Figure 3).

THE FIRST CYCLE OF EVENTS (ECVP/ESVP SUMMER SCHOOLS 2003–2006) AND PROSPECTIVE ECVP/ESVP SUMMER SCHOOLS

The SSVPs generally take place in settings where a large classroom with data projector and several screens, histology slide projection facilities (digital discussion microscope), and microscopes for all participants are available for lectures and practical sessions. The programs of the first cycle of SSVPs (2003–2006) are listed in Table 1.

The first SSVP took place in Nantes, France, at the École Nationale Vétérinaire de Nantes, in August 2003. Accommodation of the participants and lecturers was in the city center of Nantes, and shuttle-bus service was provided between the city and the veterinary school. The second and third SSVPs took place in Padua, Italy, at the Corte Benedettina in Legnaro, in July 2004 and July 2005 respectively, under the local organization of the Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Padua, Italy. The Corte Benedettina is an old monastery located in the village of Legnaro, in direct proximity to the faculty of veterinary medicine; it is owned by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Veneto and is used for seminars and training courses. Accommodation for participants and lecturers was provided on site or within the village, and a restaurant on site offered its services in the evenings. In 2005, two evening sessions were also provided: Dr. Terrell Blanchard from the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology (AFIP) in Washington, DC, introduced the new AFIP Systemic Pathology Training Web site, and Prof. Laura Peña Fernandez, a member of the ECVP Examination Committee, provided an information session on the ECVP certifying examination. Both sessions were much appreciated by the participants. In July 2006, the fourth SSVP was held at Gustavelund, a conference hotel close to Helsinki, Finland, under the local organization of the Department of Veterinary Pathology, University of Helsinki. In 2007, the SSVP will again take place in Helsinki; it will then most likely move to Spain for the next two years.

The SSVP events are constantly evaluated by the participants to provide the EC with feedback on the program. An evaluation is performed for the entire event and for each individual module, addressing the quality of the lectures, the teaching material, and the lecturer. Each year, these data are compiled in a résumé of the SSVP, which is presented to the ECVP Council for approval.

The second cycle of events will start with the 2007 SSVP, which accordingly has a program similar to that of the 2003 SSVP, with some changes in topics and lecturers as a consequence of the experience gained in previous years.⁷

POSITIVE EFFECTS OF THE ECVP/ESVP SUMMER SCHOOLS

The effects of the SSVPs are diverse and far-reaching. A direct effect can be seen in the increased number of new candidates for the ECVP certifying examination. After the first SSVP in 2003, their number increased from an average of seven since the first examination in 1999 to 17 in 2004. In 2005, 18 new candidates sat the examination; 10 of the candidates in 2006 had attended the SSVP in 2005. So far, 17 SSVP participants have become new diplomates by passing the ECVP certifying examination.

Another important effect of the SSVPs is the formation of an international network of veterinary pathologists and veterinary pathology trainees. Close contact between participants and specialists in the field is already developing. In fact, after the 2005 SSVP several participants formed a study group in preparation for the examination in 2006, to exchange material and run e-mail discussions. Others who worked in an environment where they lacked supervision by board-certified pathologists but were preparing for the ECVP certifying examination in February 2006 have spent time in institutions with a strong training emphasis. This policy will not only lead to networking between trainees but will also create a collaborative network between institutions and senior academic staff/researchers in the field. Already we have noticed a level of harmonization of post-graduate training in veterinary pathology that did not exist prior to this initiative. Both the lecturers and the organizers of the SSVPs are the driving forces in this endeavor, and we are reassured and supported by the success of the young pathologists. The environment of the SSVPs ensures that trainees adopt a high-standards, flexible approach to scientific questions and use internationally acknowledged and applied modes for identifying, describing, and interpreting pathological lesions. Hence, because the ECVP and the ACVP take a very similar approach to describing and interpreting findings, we can be assured that veterinary pathologists will, in the future, speak one “global language.”

Thus, a long-lasting effect of the SSVP will be to eliminate both institutional and national boundaries. International cooperation will lead to a more efficient use of experimental data and case material and to a greater and more effective research output. We hope that it will also provide the basis for international grant applications and recruitment of new staff, considering that SSVP lecturers are frequently heads of their departments or involved in the recruitment process. During SSVP events they have the opportunity to seek out excellent potential employees, so that the SSVPs also provide career opportunities for pathologists in training and, after ECVP certification, in the context of an international job market.

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