

# vetscope NEWS

VetSCOPE Practice Management Software

Winter 2011



## GREATER SCOPE

*Donal Lynch is committed to delivering a modern, progressive service to clients. He explains the role VetSCOPE plays in this. Donal Nugent reports.*

For those interested in how the veterinary profession in Ireland is changing, the practice of Donal Lynch, in Killurin, Tullamore, Co. Offaly, well repays a closer look. Donal, in fact, runs two practices, one specialising exclusively in small animal and the other – where he works himself – in large animal and equine. He is also a founding member of XL Vets, a group of 18 progressive Irish practices, which came together last year to achieve greater efficiencies by working collectively. Donal is determined to offer a modern, professional and efficient service to his clients and no where is this better seen than in the paperless office environment he has created. In effect, all record-keeping is now managed electronically, with only statutory financial documents stored on paper.

### Adding value

Key to developing this office environment has been the role of VetSCOPE and the practice has been using the software package for over five years now. “The initial motivation was to have a system that could manage accounts and prescriptions. When I saw it could do that I was happy but, where I became much more impressed, was when I saw how it could add value to the overall running of the practice.”

While the first to admit that, even today, he doesn't use all its facilities, Donal finds VetSCOPE invaluable on a number of fronts. In terms of client relationship

management (CRM), the reminder system is a particular boon. “You can set up reminders to yourself, and others in the practice, to do things you have promised clients. So, when you send a sample to the laboratory, you can put a note in to follow up in a week's time or to contact the farmer with the results. It creates a much better relationship with clients when you initiate contact rather than leaving it to them to enquire if results have come in.”

The value of the system's ability to keep track of all contacts with clients often only becomes apparent over time, he says. “If a client has a query, you can point to the trail of contacts showing when you got in touch and how. Everything is there on the system.” A similar ability to keep track of herd health information is also invaluable in terms of CRM. ‘A tab allows you to enter herd health information, for example diseases that might have been recorded on a farm at a particular date, whether the animals were vaccinated or not, and any lab results related to this. So, you can look up the records immediately to see if there was a problem in the past and how it was handled. It is far more efficient and professional than searching through filing cabinets.’ In this respect, Donal also notes the value of VetSCOPE Mobile, which offers similar efficiencies with regard to managing prescriptions and complying with legal obligations.

## 1 GREATER SCOPE

Donal Lynch explains how VetSCOPE has helped him offer a more professional service to his clients and create a progressive paperless office environment

## 2 MEASURING PAIN

Jacky Reid, Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia at Glasgow Veterinary School, on a new, more accurate pain scale that helps vets resolve an age-old dilemma

## 3 THE NEW OPPORTUNITY

With dairy production set to expand by up to 50% in the decade ahead, as part of the Food Harvest 2020 project, the implications for large-animal vets will be significant

## 4 LINKING IN

If you think online professional networks are not for you, it's time to think again and embrace services such as LinkedIn. Michelle Hourican explains how to get started

## WELCOME

Welcome to the winter edition of VetSCOPE News 2011. We've had excellent feedback from our interviews with VetSCOPE customers in our last issues and, in 2012, we'll share more stories of VetSCOPE users. If you've thought about embracing the paperless office concept then you will be particularly interested in our interview with Donal Lynch. Donal and his team have made VetSCOPE central to their business and we are delighted to offer another example of how our software package is at the vanguard of progressive veterinary management.

A more traditional challenge facing all vets is the measurement and treatment of pain. Fortunately, there have been huge advances on the veterinary medical side in recent years. Jacky Reid, Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia at Glasgow Veterinary School explains how a new, more accurate pain scale can provide further assistance to vets, enabling them to make an accurate assessment of pain from the very start.

Our agri-food industry is one of the few bright spots in our economy right now and, as the world population grows, and demand for food increases, the opportunity for a major expansion in farming now presents itself. We look at the potential opportunity this creates for large animal vets.

Social media appears to be taking over the world right now and it's not just for keeping up with friends. We hope our feature on professional networking sites prompts you to explore the fascinating new possibilities they present.

Finally, if you would like to participate in a future VetSCOPE Training Day, we'd be delighted to hear from you. Telephone +353 (0) 1 2602207 or email [training@vetscope.ie](mailto:training@vetscope.ie)

**Stephen Lawler**  
Managing Director  
Lawler Developments Ltd



## Efficiencies

Donal's commitment to the paperless office is shared by his office manager and, he says, "at this stage, we are as close to paperless as we can get. Obviously, we have to keep original invoices and receipts for Revenue purposes but any paper we receive or produce, we want to give to someone." Good examples of this are the lab reports which, when received by the practice, are immediately scanned into the VetSCOPE system. The originals are then sent to the client with their bill at the end of the month. Though agriculture is one of the few sectors of the economy enjoying growth at the moment, Donal points out that cashflow remains an issue and has to be watched carefully. "Our practice is certainly getting busier but the working year is levelling out. We are less busy in the spring than we used to be but busier overall. VetSCOPE helps in terms of managing cashflow, as you can very quickly and easily see what invoices are outstanding and for how long. You can measure by different criteria and you can also incorporate the information into your CRM. So, for example, you can note down when a payment was promised and have that as a reference point in your communications."

## Support

Donal also notes that, among the 18 practices involved in XL Vets, "VetSCOPE is, by far and away, the most popular choice." This became particularly evident when he recently attended a VetSCOPE Advanced Level Training Day, hosted by Clare and Stephen Lawler. "The XL Group is focused on sharing resources, whether they are financial or educational, and VetSCOPE fits naturally into that."

Over the years, Donal has been impressed by the customised level of service he receives. "You ring Stephen and, if he doesn't answer immediately, he is back to you in a short time with the help you need." A further attraction is the knowledge that he is supporting a local business at a critical time in the economy. "I would always hope that local people will support me in my business, so I see the same responsibility when I am investing. I like to support businesses that are Irish and offer quality and, for me, VetSCOPE delivers on both."



# GREATER ACCURACY IN MEASURING PAIN

*A new, more accurate pain scale is helping vets resolve an age-old dilemma.*

"If we can't measure pain, then it is difficult to manage it effectively," Jacky Reid, Professor of Veterinary Anaesthesia at Glasgow Veterinary School, explains. "Pain is a uniquely personal experience; a fact that is important to bear in mind when we come to measure it." Reid argues that the multi-dimensional nature of pain has often been under appreciated in veterinary practice. "Pain is not just how it feels but how it makes you feel, so it has motivational and emotional aspects as well as a sensory dimension. Some experts now believe animals may suffer pain even more than humans because they don't understand why they are suffering." The traditional and, thankfully, out-dated approach to post-surgery welfare management was that "pain is good" as it forced self restraint in the recuperating animal. However, while pain management is now widely accepted as a key welfare principle, the issue of gauging its level in animals remains problematic. "Self reporting is the gold standard for pain assessment," Reid says. "As animals can't self report, we need a proxy, relying on behavioural signs, to do this." In the past, vets have used simple uni-dimensional scales such as the simple descriptive scale, the numerical rating scale and the visual analogue scale to score pain in animals. "The collective problem with these scales is that they only measure the intensity of pain, not its affective properties – how it makes the animal feel," Reid says. An additional issue, confirmed by research, is

the subjectivity of these scales, which can be affected by a variety of factors. Women and younger vets, for example, tend to score pain more highly than men and older vets.

## Reducing ambiguity

Prof. Reid has played a key role in the development of the Glasgow Composite Measure Pain Scale (CMPS), a new approach to pain measurement which uses psychometric methodology to minimise any ambiguity in the definition and interpretation of pain. The key to this more accurate scale is the use of single, composite indicators drawn from observable components linked with pain or welfare. Individual items are combined to form a single composite measure or a profile of measures and a scaling model is used to reflect the level of pain or welfare associated with the given item. A short form of the pain scale (CMPS-SF) has been developed for routine clinical use in dogs after surgery and comprises six behavioural categories: vocalisation, attention to wound, mobility, response to touch, demeanour and posture/activity. The CMPS-SF was tested for validity and reliability in a study by veterinary surgeons in three veterinary schools – Glasgow, University College Dublin and North Carolina – involving 115 dogs that had undergone surgery and post-operative care. The difference in pain scores of those



considered to require analgesia compared to those that did not was highly statistically significant ( $P < 0.001$ ), with the scores in the individual schools similar to each other, confirming the validity and reliability of the scale. The CMPS-SF can be downloaded at [www.gla.ac.uk/vet/painandwelfare](http://www.gla.ac.uk/vet/painandwelfare)

## Chronic pain

In addition to post surgery in dogs, the methodology has also been applied to chronic pain in dogs and to welfare and quality of life scales for food-producing animals. "Chronic pain is very different to acute pain," Reid explains. "Acute pain stops when the healing is complete and, while it may have long-term effects, it frequently does not. Chronic pain can impact on quality of life and can be considered a disease in its own right. Through a reliable pain scale we can measure the impact of pain on quality of life in a reliable way. We can show the progress of pain over a period of time and this can help determine a humane end-point."

**Prof. Reid was speaking at the 2011 Merial Pain Management Symposium, hosted in Athens, Greece.**



Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Simon Coveney TD

# THE NEW OPPORTUNITY

*With dairy production set to expand by up to 50% in the decade ahead, the implications for large-animal vets will be significant.*

The agri-food sector is widely recognised as having a major role to play in Ireland's economic recovery and *Food Harvest 2020*, the report launched by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in 2009, offers a blueprint for how this will happen. While highlighting a strategic vision of 'smart, green growth', the report is also notable for its pragmatism and it contains over 200 recommendations on concrete actions that can be taken to support the industry in the decade ahead.

### Dairy growth

The dairy sector is a priority for *Food Harvest 2020* and the report identifies a huge opportunity for growth

thanks to increasing demand from international markets and the ending of EU milk quotas in 2015. Worldwide, demand for dairy products is expected to rise by 2.5% every year up to 2014, while, with quota systems scrapped, farmers will be in a position to upscale milk production rapidly – to as much as 50% by 2020. Speaking in June 2011 to a dairy audience, Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine Simon Coveney confirmed his Government's commitment to *Food Harvest 2020* and said the agriculture sector is now growing at a pace that no other indigenous industry can match. Sharing his belief that future growth opportunities would be very much centred on dairy, he said 'in many ways, the sector has been stagnant since quotas were introduced. In my view, there is now a really exciting opportunity for transformation with the ending of the quota system. We have a unity of purpose across the dairy sector and my job is to make sure we deliver on our potential.'

### Herd health

While the opportunity is real, *Food Harvest 2020* also recognises the need for significant structural and operational changes in the years ahead. In its most recent progress report, the *Food Harvest 2020* Implementation Committee fleshed out some of these challenges: 'Achieving the target of a 50% increase in milk production by 2020 will require an increase in the size of the national herd from its current 1.1m, to about 1.4m, dairy cows,' it says.

Among the areas of particular interest to veterinarians are the requirements by the industry to adopt best practice in animal health management and to increase the rate of genetic improvement. The Implementation

Committee believes that dairy farmers must be encouraged to participate in herd health programmes with the goal of improving national herd health status and to facilitate the development of herd health statements. It also argues that herd health monitoring data generated by milk recording agencies, slaughtering plants and veterinary laboratories should be integrated on a central database, thereby supporting increased efficiencies.

### Opportunity

Recognition of the role and the opportunity for the veterinary profession in meeting these challenges is growing. XLVets Ireland is a group of 18 independently-owned veterinary practices formed in 2010 and which has set, among its goals, the tackling of the ongoing problems of under-performing dairy herds in Ireland. Speaking at the launch of the group, Chairman Ger Cusack, made specific reference to the *Food Harvest 2020* report and said it was 'important to translate the rising awareness of the economic significance of the health of the national herd into practical and pro-active actions that can be taken at farm level'.

While many are hoping the restraints of the quota system will be relaxed before it is finally abolished, there is no convincing sign yet from the European Commission that this will be the case. Nevertheless, across the dairy industry, preparations are being made for what will be a once-in-a-generation period of growth. For the veterinary profession, the implications of expansion are only being teased out. Like every other stakeholder, however, it will need to ensure that it is fully prepared for the opportunities and challenges ahead.

# VETSCOPE TRAINING DAY

## BOOK NOW

The last VetSCOPE Training Day was held in October in Dublin and was fully booked. The Advanced Level 1 course is suitable for the principals of veterinary practices and support staff that have used VetSCOPE for at least six months. The learning objectives are that, on completion of the course, participants will be able to:

- input data correctly, so the practice can generate reports on the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators); and,
- identify areas within the practice where VetSCOPE can improve efficiencies to save money and generate extra income.

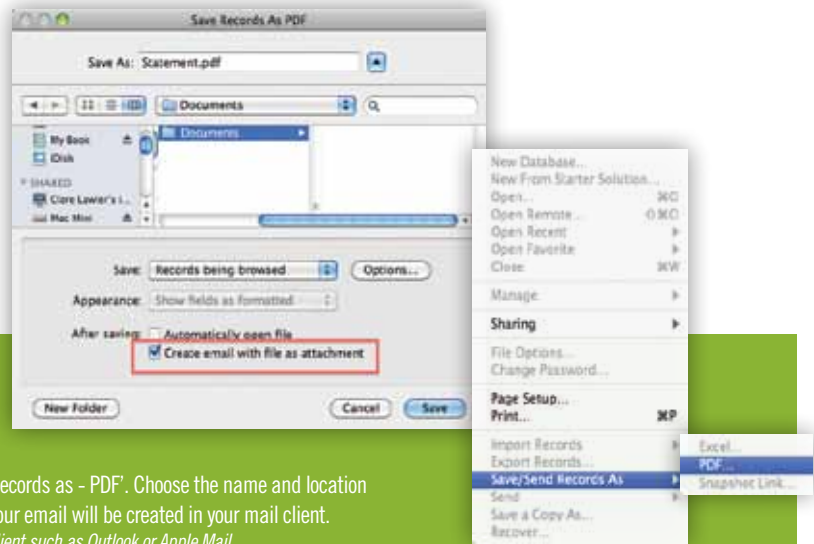
Participants have found the course very worthwhile, easy to follow and very informative. For further information on VetSCOPE training see [www.vetscope.ie](http://www.vetscope.ie)

If you would like to register your interest in attending a future course, please let us know by emailing [training@vetscope.ie](mailto:training@vetscope.ie)



# BACKING UP – IS HARD TO DO!

No its not! Consider that, in the past, to back up all your animal records would require you taking several filing cabinets-worth home with you every evening. Today, with VetSCOPE, the same amount of information and more can be easily held on a CD or USB key. Remember fire, flood, theft, breakdown and more can strike your business at ANY time. Don't be caught out. Backup today. To download our backup procedures please visit the support section of [www.vetscope.ie](http://www.vetscope.ie)



## DID YOU KNOW?...

That you can email reports right from within VetSCOPE\*.

When the report is on screen, simply select from the file menu 'Save/Send Records as - PDF'. Choose the name and location to save the file. Tick the option to create an email with attachment\*\* and your email will be created in your mail client.

\*May not work with older versions of FileMaker (can be upgraded). \*\*Needs email client such as Outlook or Apple Mail

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## LINKING IN

*It's time to stop procrastinating and embrace online professional networks, as Michelle Hourican explains.*

One person's lost opportunity is another's gain – and no more so than in the current climate. If we do not utilise the tools that give us a competitive advantage, someone else will. LinkedIn offers an exceptional opportunity to highlight your expertise to your clients, brand your areas of expertise to peers, and participate in groups within your sector or areas of interest.

Before going further, let's address some common fears Irish people tend to have about all these technological fads. Recently, I demonstrated LinkedIn to 10 sceptical professionals and was amazed at the comments I received. The most promising feedback was that they all found it very informative and incredibly intriguing. Once the 'test drive' was finished, I asked if they would then set an account up themselves. At this stage, the fear of IT became obvious. Perhaps, more surprisingly, the fear of generating publicity emerged as the bigger obstacle. Let's face it, the traditional Irish way is not to overly promote oneself, as this is perceived to be pretentious. However, we are in a different world now and the game has changed dramatically. New business is harder to find and contacts play a vital role in surviving, whatever your business.

### Benefits

So what are the real benefits to setting yourself up on LinkedIn?

- Access to people: your clients, potential clients, your peers, your professional body and your industry sector;
- Demonstrate your areas of expertise by participating in 'answers' and in e-mail forums. This is an

excellent way to enhance your reputation;

- Use LinkedIn to get answers from experts and make new contacts;
- Search for employment or recruit; and,
- Join groups on LinkedIn in which you may share commonalities such as location, interests, education and industry knowledge.

Groups vets can join for free as a member of LinkedIn include Animal Health, Nutrition and Production Professionals and Veterinary Professionals (a group which allows people who work in veterinary medicine to connect). LinkedIn receives a strong page ranking in search engines, so it is one way to get your name ranked. What this means is that, if a prospective client Googles your name, your LinkedIn information comes up. Given most people now search out information online about their service providers before engaging with them, the value of this is obvious.

### Take action

The quick way to get started:

- Go into LinkedIn.com and log on for the first time
- Create your profile. Spend time getting the correct message out there about yourself. Use business English to describe your areas of skills, talents and experiences. Do not be afraid to put up a professional photo of you, however, casual or holiday photos should be avoided.
- Connect with your network. The easiest way to start is to invite people from your email contacts first, then LinkedIn will provide you with a list of colleagues from your current and past jobs who are on LinkedIn

and you may invite them. Likewise, with your previous classmates. If they are set up, you have the opportunity to connect. By this stage you should be able to locate some connections that you may have lost contact with.

- Join groups that are of interest to you in your career. This might be your professional body's official group but it can also be groups with a common interest.
- When you have your contacts set up, look for recommendations from clients, peers and management. Recommendations are valuable endorsements and these will increase your appeal to new clients.

So now you've finished this article, your excuses have been tackled and your misgivings addressed. It's time to get LinkedIn!

*Michelle Hourican is a lecturer at Independent Colleges*

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