Animal-induced Injuries of Humans

One of our areas of focus in VCOT has long been the management of traumatic injuries in animals. Traumatic injuries in animals can arise from racing, falls, vehicular impact, and attacks from other animals, among other things. In the previous issue of VCOT was a report by Jordan and colleagues about the high risk of injury of vital structures, especially airways, sustained by dogs and cats that were bitten in the cervical region by other dogs (1). Aggressive behaviour by “man’s best friend” culminates in a surprisingly large number of bite wound injuries, and occasional deaths, of humans as well.

Xiaowei and colleagues report that approximately 5000 patients are treated annually at the Peking University People’s Hospital in Beijing China for animal-induced injuries. From this population base, they conducted a prospective, randomized study comparing infection rates and cosmetic appearance of dog-bite wounds treated by primary or delayed wound closure (2). We are happy to see this paper published in VCOT because it provides a welcome boost to our mission to be a journal that encompasses comparative traumatology. Moreover, it is also a reminder of the need to look for opportunities to conduct well-designed prospective studies, in place of the usual retrospective clinical studies. To my knowledge, this is the first paper that we have ever published from China, and the first about animal-induced injuries in humans.

Veterinarians are acutely aware of the risks of being injured by their patients. The types of injuries sustained by people are influenced by the species of the “attacking” animal (3). Large animals, including horses and cattle, produce blunt force injuries by kicking, crushing or trampling. This is particularly the case with massive animals like the elephant, in regions where human civilization encroaches upon the animal habitat (4). By contrast, sharp force injuries from carnivores, most often dogs, produce punctures and degloving injuries as well as lacerations and crushing. A search of PubMed revealed numerous studies of animal-induced injuries in humans. One surprising statistic from an epidemiologic study from Iceland was that the main cause of traumatic spinal cord injury in sport and leisure activities was horse-riding accidents, followed by winter sport accidents, especially among women (5). It made me realize that I had better be more careful with skiing, and to forget about any plan to resume horse riding.

Warm wishes to our Emeritus Editor-in-Chief

Last month I briefly visited Geoff Sumner-Smith, our esteemed Emeritus Editor-in-Chief and was able to enjoy an early celebration of his 85th birthday which occurs this month. Geoff is very well. As always, he is highly informed and keen to engage in lively discussion. Needless to say, his wit and “British humour” are just as sharp as ever. Geoff - from all of the VCOT team and your professional colleagues, I want to take this opportunity to wish you a very happy birthday, and we look forward to celebrating many more with you.

Finally you might notice at the end of this editorial that I am fortunate to be located in Berlin - one of the great cities of this world. Until the end of 2013, I am a Guest Professor in Berlin where I plan to learn much more about comparative orthopaedics from my new colleagues here. However this will not alter my role or involvement as the Editor-in-Chief of VCOT. Indeed it is very nice to be geographically much closer to the home of VCOT at Schattauer Publishing, in Stuttgart.

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References

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