

LeishVet group milestones: beyond a scientific association

Background and objectives

Canine leishmaniosis (CanL) is a common and important zoonotic disease present in many countries worldwide. Although initially described in the 1900s in the epidemiological context of recently identified cases of human visceral leishmaniosis in the Mediterranean Basin, the medical aspects described in dogs at that time were minimal due to the lack of research and limited data available. For a long time, the appropriate management of CanL in veterinary medicine was not well described.

LeishVet is a non-profit scientific association conceived in 2005 during the Worldleish 3 forum held in Palermo (Italy) and founded later in 2008 by veterinarians from academic institutions of different countries focusing their research and clinical activity on leishmaniosis in veterinary medicine (www.leishvet.org). Founding members came from different universities located in France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Portugal and Spain, the latter being where the association is legally registered. A new member, Christine Petersen from the University of Iowa (USA) enriched the group composition for several years. Currently (2024), the group is composed of 8 active members and 3 consultant members. The main goal of LeishVet is to support veterinary practitioners and public health authorities to better understand the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of animal leishmaniosis, basically CanL and more recently feline leishmaniosis (FeL), in the context of a One Health approach and to establish an internationally recognized set of guidelines.

Organization (material and methods)

In detail, LeishVet contributes to standardize criteria for the diagnosis and clinical management of CanL and FeL and makes recommendations for the control of *Leishmania* infection. This work is based on the combination of a rigorous analysis of published or reported information and research, with the experience and the expertise of members in the different veterinary domains of animal leishmaniosis. LeishVet members meet regularly to discuss and prepare several scientific activities related to the activities of the group.

The dissemination of current knowledge on CanL and FeL is conveyed at both national and international congresses and through scientific publications in international indexed journals and social media. Moreover, LeishVet develops initiative actions and research on animal leishmaniosis.

Productivity of the group (results)

The LeishVet association has published articles in international journals such as *Trends in Parasitology* and *Parasite and Vectors* and has published guidelines since 2011 for CanL and since 2015 for FeL, both available at www.leishvet.org. These guidelines have been regularly updated to include new validated research useful for the management of CanL and FeL by veterinarians.

Moreover, the LeishVet group organizes international conferences especially dedicated to veterinary and animal aspects of *Leishmania* infections termed the Animal Leishmaniosis International Veterinary Event (ALIVE). The first ALIVE conference was held in Málaga, Spain (ALIVE1 Congress, March 31st–April 2nd, 2022), and the second conference will take place in Nice, France (ALIVE2 Congress, April 18th–20th, 2024). They represent a synthesis of the broad range of topics that LeishVet deals with.

LeishVet guidelines on CanL and FeL, currently translated into seven languages, are considered a point of reference for thousands of veterinarians and academics all over the world, both in endemic and non-endemic areas for leishmaniosis. The LeishVet CanL clinical staging is most useful for classifying the stage of the disease in which *Leishmania*-infected dogs are and thus provides an accurate treatment and prognosis. The staging is crucial for decision-making by practitioners, and it is also used in scientific research.

Although LeishVet is funded by the contribution of commercial and academic sponsors, it is an independent nonprofit group whose activities and choices are not influenced by these contributions, for which the group is grateful.

Independently from a scientific purpose, what makes the work of the LeishVet members special is the climate of great familiarity and collaboration that has been established among them over the years. This particular feeling makes the achievement of objectives easier and stimulates the group to continue towards new goals and a better understanding of this complex disease, always with a One Health approach.

References

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