"Vetbaset® 3.1"

SOFTWARE REVIEW. . .

"Vetbase® 3.1", by J. D. Kuiper and H. J. Kuiper, Dutch Veterinary Information Systems, Graafschap 7, 3524 TL Utrecht, The Netherlands (e-mail: vetbase@vetinfo.demon.nl; Website: www.vetinfo.demon.nl); US$175.00.

As an author of a drug dosage book, it is difficult not to inject personal biases into a review of another product that purports to perform much the same function. I have, however, tried to remain as objective as possible in this review, although I'm sure a bias or two will leak out. Additionally, I will limit the bulk of this review to the application of this database to exotic animals, since those species would presumably be of the most interest to readers of this journal. In all fairness, Vetbase® does emphasize domestic species and its ultimate utility may reside in that domain.

Vetbase® can be operated on PC's using either Windows® 3.1 or 95. The software comes on three floppy disks (no CD's) and installs using standard installation procedures. The first time I attempted to load Vetbase® on my relatively new PC, it locked the computer up completely. Re-booting failed and I had to shut off the power in order to re-start it. The second attempt at installation went smoothly and subsequent opening and closing of Vetbase® was uneventful. It is unknown whether this installation problem was a function of my computer or the software.

Upon launching Vetbase®, a window appears with buttons that allow selection of the animal type (e.g., birds, laboratory species, domestic species, exotic species, etc.). Under exotics, one can select specific (e.g., elephant), or generic species (e.g., carnivores, exotic canidae). The next button selects the drug group (e.g., nervous system/anaesthetics). These groups can be reordered so that specific drug types are listed first, followed by their relative system (e.g., anaesthetics/nervous system). The next button allows selection of a specific drug (e.g., ketamine, xylazine, etc.). Finally, an administration route can be selected, but oftentimes this is not necessary as there will only be one option (e.g., parenteral, intramuscular).

Pressing the appropriate button displays the record containing the above information. If there is more than one record, one can move through them individually or display a summary page, which lists all the records that fit the input parameters. The display record lists individual species, drug type, dosages, dosage interval, route, and usually a reference.

One feature of this database is the unique ability to extrapolate dosages from a known species to an unknown one. This works by entering a known dosage, animal type, and body weight and by entering a target animal type and target body weight. Using Kleiber's Law, the program then gives an estimated dosage for the unknown animal. This is a neat feature and one that could be useful; however, it is no substitute for real data.

And it is the paucity of real data with which I have my biggest concern with Vetbase®. The authors claim that Vetbase® covers more than 170 species, including domestic, laboratory, and exotic species. However, there are books that provide drug dosages for *hundreds* of exotic species alone. Thus, there is a great deal of information on exotic species that apparently was not utilized by Vetbase®. Although Vetbase® has the ability to extrapolate from one species to another, this is a poor substitute for actual data. Indeed, when I ran several trials, very few specific exotic species could be found and when located, very few drug choices were available. There were entire groups of animals for which there were no data at all (e.g., viverrids).

Additionally, there were drug dosages for which the selection was entirely inappropriate. For example, vitamin E is found when "ruminants/bighorn sheep/nutritional products" are selected. Yet, the reference for this selection is concerned with administering vitamin E during a capture operation as a possible means of ameliorating capture myopathy. It has nothing to do with vitamin E being used as a nutritional supplement.

Which brings up the whole issue of the references used in Vetbase®. Here, I must allow a personal bias to come to the fore. There are literally thousands of primary references in peer-reviewed scientific journals that deal with drug dosages for exotic species. Yet, Vetbase® overwhelmingly uses book chapters and review articles as references. I have used such references myself, but only when the primary source was unavailable. Many of these chapters and reviews cite primary literature, yet Vetbase® apparently chose to ignore these. I consider primary references essential background information for users of compendiums, regardless of the format.

There are several other faults with Vetbase®, some major, some minor. Right up front, Vetbase® is described as "a database with veterinary dosages for *non-antibiotic* drugs." Yet, antibiotics are probably the most widely prescribed pharmaceuticals regardless of the species. The absence of antibiotics in this database severely limits its usefulness.

I found other minor irritations that relate to programming and not to content. Universally, Windows® presentations use a vertical scroll bar to scroll vertically and a horizontal bar to move across the window horizontally. For some perverse reason, Vetbase® has chosen to use horizontal scroll bars to scroll vertically. Also, the Vetbase® format allows one to view a single column or double column of selections. Unfortunately, if you select the double column format, there is not enough room in the window and the columns overlap, thereby hiding information. Aha, thought I, I will simply select the universal Windows® icon that expands the view to fill the entire computer screen and, thus, enable me to view both columns of information unimpeded. But alas, this command does not function with Vetbase® and one is left viewing a window that occupies about one-third of the screen.

Lastly, the authors claim that Vetbase® is the "*first and only* database with a large number of veterinary drug dosages." I am familiar with at least three other electronic forms of drug dosages in North America (some of which include antibiotics!). Thus, I believe the novelty and usefulness of Vetbase® is overstated.

I believe many people get enamored with new technology without realizing that such technology may not be all that much of an improvement. For example, the time it took to launch Vetbase®, locate a specific species, and locate a specific dosage was 32 sec (assuming your computer was already up and running; if not, add at least 120 sec). Looking up the same species and the same dosage in the archaic book form took 7 sec. It's your time, you choose. It's also your money. Vetbase® costs US$175. For half that price, you can buy two to three books that cover more species with more dosages and more references. Besides, books look cooler in your office.

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