



**WSAVA**  
**Global Pain Council**

## **Press Information**

8 April 2016

### **WSAVA Urges Veterinarians to Confirm that Ketamine is an Essential Medicine**

Despite a recent decision by the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) to reject the international scheduling of ketamine, the [World Small Animal Veterinary Association \(WSAVA\)](http://www.wsava.org) remains concerned that access to this essential medicine is under threat. It is calling on veterinarians globally to support its campaign to ensure continued access to the drug for veterinary - and human - medicine. This was the message at a press briefing during BSAVA Congress given by Dr Sheilah Robertson, board member of the WSAVA's Global Pain Council.

"Ketamine is a safe anaesthetic which has been used worldwide for more than 50 years," she explained. "It does not depress respiration or the circulation and can be used without oxygen, ventilators and electricity supply and support systems required for other anaesthetics. These characteristics make it the only anaesthetic suitable for both medical and veterinary use in the developing world."

She continued: "Ketamine also has particular value 'in the field' for humans and animals and is used to treat trauma, traffic and sporting injuries and those resulting from natural disasters and conflict zones. It is often the only product that can be used for dog and cat neutering initiatives, making it critical for the control of zoonotic diseases, such as Rabies."

A number of countries, led by China, have been campaigning to have ketamine 'internationally scheduled'. This would prevent access to it in most developing countries as the documentation required for internationally scheduled drugs can be prohibitively bureaucratic. As a result, says the WSAVA, it would put a complete stop to surgical treatment in many parts of the world, including dog and cat neutering programmes, causing great suffering to animals and an increased risk to human health.

While the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) and the UN CND have both recently advised against placing ketamine under international control, China, which has a problem with the illicit production of the drug for 'recreational' use, has expressed its disappointment and announced that it will lobby for the decision to be reversed at future meetings.

Dr Robertson continued: "Together with many other veterinary and medical bodies, we are strongly opposed to moves to schedule ketamine because we regard it as essential for human and veterinary medical practice and for wildlife conservation.

"This is a battle our patients can't afford us to lose so we are campaigning to provide a global perspective on ketamine's importance to veterinary medicine and to unite the voices of those who support us. Our petition already has more than 5,000 signatures and we urge vets and others with an interest in this issue to show their support by signing it."

She added: "We intend to keep the debate about ketamine in the spotlight and ensure we are ready demonstrate its value when future UN meetings are proposed. China will, no doubt, continue to lobby for it to be internationally scheduled and we would regard this as a disastrous decision. We stand with the World Health Organisation which recently confirmed its view that ketamine is an essential medicine."

The WSAVA is an umbrella organisation focused on enhancing the clinical care of companion animals around the world. It represents 158,000 veterinarians globally through 96 member associations, including the BSAVA. Set up in response to the challenges faced by the profession in diagnosing and managing pain in small animals around the world, the WSAVA's Global Pain Council works to raise global standards of pain management.

More information about the WSAVA's ketamine campaign is available here:

<http://www.wsava.org/educational/global-pain-council>

The petition is here: <http://chn.ge/1RFSou6>.

#### **Notes to editors:**

In November 2015, the WHO Expert Committee on Drug Dependence (ECDD) reiterated its consistent recommendation that ketamine should not be placed under international control, stating that its abuse does not cause a global public health threat and that control would limit access for those who use it as a life-saving anaesthetic. This view was confirmed at a meeting of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in March 2016 in Vienna.

#### **For further information:**

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