

Nottingham Recorder

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Exclusive! Nottingham Vet School Epidemic

By Reed N. Wright, prize-winning Investigative Reporter

Students hospitalised - QMC and GPs overwhelmed - mystery virus puts city at risk



Students at Nottingham vet school (above left); Q-fever in Holland led to thousands of goats being culled (above right)

The Nottingham Recorder has learned that local veterinary students are dropping like flies after an outbreak of a mystery virus called Q fever. This disease can cause abortions and pneumonia and kill both people and animals. In 2010 more than 2000 human cases of the disease occurred in the Netherlands, and the Dutch government slaughtered over 50,000 dairy goats in an effort to prevent the disease from spreading further. However the virus also infects cattle, sheep and a wide range of other animals, commonly found on the region's farms as well as at Nottingham vet school's rural campus.

No comment was available from the Vet School or the University's PR Office. However a staff member who wished to remain anonymous admitted the whole school was in a state of panic, 'students are refusing to come to lectures or do any practical classes that involve animals,' she said.

Phil Anders, an expert on sheep diseases at the University of Burrumbuttock in Australia said he would be surprised if the epidemic really was of Q-fever, since all veterinary students would have been

vaccinated. 'We insist all our staff and students are vaccinated here as it's such a nasty disease,' he said.

A mysterious government group, working out of the notorious animal research centre at Sutton Bonington, are said to be investigating the outbreak. Reporters from the *Notts Recorder* tried without success to contact the group, which doesn't appear on any government web site but is believed to work closely with Porton Down. However, several of the students involved in the outbreak have been telling friends on Facebook that they have laboratory-confirmed Q fever. Ann Thrax posted, 'pulled a Q-sickie and got out of boring lectures.'

When we contacted QMC, spokesperson Will Doolittle said he couldn't release any information on patients, could not comment on individual cases and he continued that had never heard of this mysterious Sutton Bonington-based group.

Official advice is that if you show any of the following symptoms, you should contact your GP.

- Fever
- Diarrhoea
- Vomiting
- Head and muscle aches

Local GPs in the Sutton Bonington area said they had been overwhelmed with inquiries, but had been given no information about the outbreak or the disease so it was hard for them to give any advice to worried patients.

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