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## Differential diagnosis

As was highlighted in the last Dairyhealth BYTES, Malignant Catarrhal Fever (MCF) presents itself in a variety of forms with many clinical signs, which can often present a problem.

Head and eye lesions, for example, can easily be confused with severe IBR and respiratory and conjunctival infections because, in some severely affected IBR cases, corneal oedema can occur. However, in the case of IBR, affected animals have characteristic mucoid plaques present on the palpebral conjunctivitis and nasal mucosa.

Most mucosal diseases, such as bovine viral diarrhoea and foot and mouth disease, should be considered on the basis of the duration, location and severity signs/lesions. The differential diagnosis of cows with severe diarrhoea, but minimal mucosal lesions, could be confused with bovine viral diarrhoea or rinderpest. Acute bracken poisoning, bacillary haemoglobinuria and other causes of haematuria need to be considered in cases of acute MCF with haemorrhagic cystitis. Sloughing of muzzle epithelium can be confused with primary or secondary photosensitisation.

When eye lesions are present the differential diagnosis is easier since only MCF has a severe uveitis and ophthalmitis. In some severe cases of IBR, conjunctivitis can have corneal oedema but the intraocular inflammation does not occur with IBR.

So, without going through every aspect of the differential diagnosis of MCF, it can be seen that clinical signs alone might not be enough on which to base a diagnosis, however they can be supported by laboratory tests.

Tests can be done for the causative agent and its antigens or the antibodies that they induce.

Histopathology can be useful in determining the nature of some of the lesions; it can also identify the pathognomic diffuse vasculitis with lymphocytic infiltrates in various organs, including the gastrointestinal tract, the urinary system, the liver, the adrenals and the skin and, finally, whether a necrotising vasculitis is present in lymphoid tissues.

## Prevention

Prevention of Malignant Catarrhal Fever centres on limiting exposure to infected wildebeest and sheep. The causal virus has been shown to travel over 70m, therefore the distance between infected animals and your herd wants to be greater than this. In fact, some experts recommend having a distance of one mile between your dairy herd and sheep.

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