Conclusions

As stated in the Preface to Volume 10 (4) of the Scientific and Technical Review, which opened these two special issues, veterinary public health (VPH) is clearly of growing importance for Veterinary Services throughout the world.

In fact, Veterinary Services perform many VPH activities (such as control of food safety, drug residue control and the control of zoonoses) solely for the protection of human health. The articles published in issues 10 (4) and 11 (1) of the Review suggest that the importance of VPH will increase in most Member Countries of the OIE, for three essential reasons:

- in the course of the twentieth century, the major epizootics have largely been mastered, thereby freeing animal husbandry of a serious constraint

- the intensification of animal husbandry, made possible by these advances, has become the goal of countries which see in such production a means of economic development; intensification has in turn given rise to new pathological disorders, closely linked to management and husbandry practices

- the heightened demands of consumers for products of ensured quality, without risk for human health and obtained under conditions which respect the environment and animal welfare.

This evolution is visible in the different sections of these two volumes: history, organisation, specialised activities and future perspectives in VPH.

THE HISTORY OF VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH

The convergence of events in different parts of the world is well illustrated by the six articles on the history of VPH, which also draw attention to the increasing number of veterinary activities aimed at protecting human health. The purely veterinary scope of the profession, inherited from the farriers of years ago, has gradually been transformed as the numbers of horses, draught animals and small farms declined. Surveillance and control of the major epizootics were once the primary tasks of veterinarians, until their successes in these domains encouraged governments to take less account of the dangers — though such an attitude may be based on excessive optimism, especially in periods of geopolitical upheaval. Epidemiological forecasting is a perilous art. In 1947 the founder of the OIE, Emmanuel Leclainche, could write: “it appears that it may be possible, at least, to eliminate a few old and dwindling diseases: rabies, glanders, dourine, bovine pleuropneumonia. Their eradication can be envisaged and promptly achieved through concerted actions.”
Likewise: "one may be permitted to think that we are in the presence of the final manifestations of a scourge (foot and mouth disease) which has henceforth been conjured away" or "rinderpest has from this time forth been neutralised".

At any rate, veterinarians have long been aware of the need to turn their attention, at least to some extent, from animal epidemics to problems in public health. In 1924, during the international conference for the study of epizootics at which the OIE was founded, veterinarians called for "close collaboration between organisations responsible for animal health and human health". In 1945, veterinarians suggested that a "Veterinary Public Health" Section be established in the World Health Organisation.

Since then, the active involvement of veterinarians has enhanced public health throughout the world. Through a variety of methods, and with different degrees of impetus, all Veterinary Services have organised their administrative structures in such a way as to integrate this new dimension into their activities.

**ORGANISATION OF VETERINARY PUBLIC HEALTH ACTIVITIES**

Organisational schemes vary from one region to the next, and even among countries of a single region.

Nevertheless, some major trends may be noted:

- VPH activities can be attributed to different ministries within a government. If a "department" in the Ministry of Agriculture most often plays the key role, other departments may also be involved (e.g. from the Ministries of Public Health, Economy, the Interior, Consumer Affairs, or even from specialised non-ministerial Committees).

- Within the competent Ministry, public health activities may be "split up", with problems related to zoonoses, food safety, veterinary drugs and the environment assigned to different services. A given field (for instance, the inspection of food products) may be the responsibility of different sections (meat inspection, fishery products inspection, etc.).

- Communications channels are generally established (between ministries, departments, services and sections) to ensure the coherence of public health actions. In many cases, however, the efficiency of these networks is less than satisfactory. The presence of members of one profession (veterinarians) is often the best guarantee of concerted decisions.

- It is increasingly common for VPH activities to be decentralised and assigned to regional bodies. In general, however, a central body retains authority for problems of national importance (relating, for instance, to the major zoonoses, the control of veterinary drugs, and research and training programmes).

Apart from the administrative difficulties involved in coherently managing services attached to different governmental bodies, the main obstacles encountered in the organisation of a VPH Service in most countries concern the increasing lack of equipment and funds and the absence of appropriate training programmes.
SPECIALISED ACTIVITIES

Although the list of these activities has grown considerably over the years, the following sectors represent the most basic VPH activities:

- diagnosis, surveillance and control of zoonoses, in domestic animals and wildlife
- live and post-mortem inspection of animals intended for human consumption (including poultry, fish, molluscs and shellfish)
- control of the quality, use and residues of veterinary drugs (including biologicals and products derived from biotechnology)
- protection of the environment from pollution by (live or dead) animals and effluents from husbandry establishments.

Along with these major areas, other activities are sometimes of note: wildlife population management, disaster medicine, psychology of man-animal relations, etc.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The outlook for VPH is sketched by three authors in the final section of the present issue, on the basis of the wealth of experience acquired by the World Health Organisation (K. Bögel), the Pan American Health Organisation (P.V. Arámbulo III) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (V. Kouba). Along with the diverse orientations and interests of these three organisations, the analyses all highlight the importance of the changes currently in progress:

- the evolution of animal health problems in most regions of the world: whereas the direct threat of major epidemics has subsided, new methods in animal husbandry, reproduction and nutrition have given rise to new pathological disorders
- the pressures exerted by the growth of the human population and the corresponding increase in animal populations
  - the steady acceleration of international trade
  - the growing force of information media
  - the emergence of biotechnology
- the new concerns of contemporary societies, in which ever greater attention is directed towards consumers, with increased controls on food safety, care of the environment, respect for animal welfare, surveillance of residues of chemical substances and drugs, etc.

These demands can be summarised in a model, that of the health triad of “environment – animals – man” (K. Bögel).

All of these challenges have led or will lead Veterinary Services to raise questions about their orientations, organisation, administrative structures, means of action, and the training of their officers. There is general agreement among those in positions
of leadership: the veterinary profession must take advantage of these new opportunities or else risk losing its influence in these fields. However, this does not mean the profession must abandon its previous tasks or neglect epidemiological surveillance and the improvement of animal products. *Veterinarians must adapt, by rethinking their organisational schemes, improving their training and becoming familiar with the new technologies, in order to respond more adequately to the new requirements of public health.*

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