

CASE REPORT (1) – INDIA

Rahman S. A.

Retd. Dean, Bangalore Veterinary College, 123, 7th B Main Road, 4th Block West, Jayanagar, Bangalore 560011, India

Rabies is endemic throughout the country except for the islands of Andaman, Nicobar and Lakshadweep. Data on animal rabies is very scarce and there is no organized system of surveillance to assess the disease burden annually. Molecular epidemiological studies on Indian isolates need to be undertaken.

The dog (97%) is the principal vector followed by cats (2 %) and others such as cattle, sheep, goats, horses, pigs, camels and monkeys. The pet dog population is about 28 million and an equal number are estimated to be stray.

The role, approaches to and effectiveness of Rabies control are not well defined. Though it is the mandate of the Government Veterinary Services it is often animal welfare organizations supported by Animal Welfare Board of India, through the municipal corporations, which are involved in vaccination of dogs as a part of catch neutering release programmes. In some cities dog population has been stabilised by neutering of dogs and vaccination coverage done which has resulted in control of both canine and human rabies. The main obstacle in preventing canine and human rabies in India is the lack of sustainable centralized effort and the fact that rabies by law is not a notifiable disease.

The affliction of domestic animals of economic importance by rabies in rural areas is an important public health concern. People in rural areas are largely ignorant of the disease. The myths and traditional practices further compound this problem. The curriculum in the medical, veterinary and other health sciences colleges does not emphasise the importance of this deadly disease.

An effective and economical tool to combat rabies would be the oral immunization of stray dogs as a complementary to parenteral immunisation. Newer oral vaccines to suit Indian conditions have been developed and are in the process of being tried. Community empowerment projects for rabies control have been highly successful.

