

Feedback from ongoing twinning project between Chiang Mai University and University of Minnesota including contributions of twinning to improvement of education in the region

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Summary

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Chiang Mai University, Thailand (CMU) and the College of Veterinary Medicine at University of Minnesota (UMN) have partnered in a Veterinary Education Twinning Project since 2013. Twinning enhanced teaching materials and approaches, and strengthened the curricula of both partners related to the “OIE Day-1 veterinary graduate competencies”. Faculty twinning collaborations have led to joint teaching and research. Lessons learned have been shared through Southeast Asia.

Keywords: Day-1 veterinary graduate competencies, twinning, veterinary education

Introduction

Critical concerns about transboundary animal diseases, emerging zoonoses, antibiotic resistance, and food safety highlight the need for a global veterinary workforce equipped to address these challenges. The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) evaluations of Performance of Veterinary Services indicate a need for strengthening veterinary curricula and expanding continued education for veterinary professionals working in government. The OIE established Veterinary Educational Twinning Projects to foster partnerships between veterinary education establishments from developed and developing countries to help assure high quality national veterinary services.

The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine at Chiang Mai University, Thailand (CMU) and the College of Veterinary Medicine at University of Minnesota (UMN) were invited by the OIE to initiate the first Veterinary Education Twinning Project in June 2013.

Twinning Project Design

The CMU-UMN twinning project comprises three parallel activities to strength veterinary education: 1) curriculum mapping to recognise strengths and guide enhancements that emphasise OIE competencies for Day 1 graduates (Day 1 competencies); 2) faculty exchanges and professional development to enhance the knowledge and didactic skills of teaching staff; and 3) bilateral exchanges of veterinary students and teaching staff to see how Day 1 competencies are taught by each other.

Twinning Project Outcomes

The process of curriculum mapping proved to be timely as both veterinary faculties were in the process of revising their curricula when the twinning project began. The twinning project promoted curriculum enhancements focused on specific gaps identified by the mapping. Curriculum enhancement has been an incremental process involving integration of additional educational objectives, incorporation of some new materials, and addition of active learning approaches and online teaching materials as part of existing courses. Short animated infographics were integrated into multiple courses to enhance student understanding of specific OIE Day 1 competencies such as animal welfare, emerging and re-emerging diseases, and risk analysis.

Faculty development focused on the teaching staff most interested in strengthening their skills. Workshops provided exposure to new approaches and supported development of teaching modules and online materials. Student feedback of the new approaches has supported continuous improvement by affirming many of the enhancements and pointing out opportunities for additional constructive change. Co-teaching continuing education programs also created strong relationships among teaching staff from both twinning partners, and facilitated transfer of best practices.

The student exchanges were originally conceived as international experiential opportunities for a small number of students. The exchanges were modified to create two cohorts of 10 students each (5 students from CMU and 5 from UMN in each cohort) who completed their final year public health clinical rotation at both institutions, accompanied by their professors. The participation of faculty in each other's courses proved to be the most powerful demonstration of alternative approaches for teaching core competencies, as some 'best practices' were identified in both CMU and UMN. Public health rotations at both twinning partners were improved after these exchanges.

Contributions of the Twinning Project to the Region

The twinning process of curriculum development was shared in the Dean's Consortium of veterinary schools of Thailand. Lessons learned during the project were shared as well through newsletters disseminated every six months and presentations at Veterinary Educational conferences for the South East Asia Veterinary School Association (SEAVSA), the Asian Association of Veterinary Schools (AAVS) and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC). The regional impact of the project was expanded by workshops focusing on Day-1 specific competency module development and active learning techniques for key teaching staff members from veterinary faculties across Thailand. Moreover, ideas for implementing of OIE Day-1 Competencies were introduced through a panel discussion on "Veterinary Education Twinning" held during the International Food Safety and Zoonoses Symposium in 2015. Chiang Mai's participation in the US Agency for International Development One Health Workforce project has allowed many of the key twinning learnings to be shared with veterinary, medical and public health faculties throughout Southeast Asia. The CMU approach to curriculum strengthening using "Day 1 Veterinary Graduates" will be shared at the Thai Veterinary Education Conference 2015-2016 as an example of how to integrate current curriculum with the educational requirements of the Thai Veterinary Council.

Conclusion

Veterinary education twinning projects can help change curricula and teaching approaches in both developed and developing countries. Experiential opportunities for students and faculty to participate in teaching at each other's institutions proved especially beneficial. Online teaching materials and active learning exercises can be shared easily. The strong commitment of numerous faculty members and top leadership at CMU and UMN is a key factor in the success. Collaboration forged during twinning has expanded into joint continuing education and research projects of mutual benefit.