

State of play in development of national and regional accreditation bodies for veterinary education establishments in Asia

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Summary

Accreditation is a quality assurance process through which institutional services and operations are regularly evaluated by external bodies to determine if applicable standards are met. Among 17 Asian countries on the OIE list, an accreditation system for veterinary education establishments (VEEs) was identified in 10 of 17 countries (59%). The accreditation standards vary in areas of focus and in the number of criteria (from 5 to 11). The duration of accreditation validity ranges from 3 to 15 years. The results of this analysis indicate that the national accreditation systems for VEEs in Asia vary significantly among member countries.

A regional accreditation body in Asia has not yet been established. However, the Asian Association of Veterinary Schools (AAVS) has taken practical steps toward standardising curricula and accreditation for veterinary education. The ongoing efforts for the mutual recognition agreement among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries will also facilitate the standardisation of veterinary education and the foundation of a regional accreditation body for VEEs in Asia.

Veterinary education is an important element supporting the effective Veterinary Services. Adequate national and regional accreditation bodies in Asia are required to effectively harmonise the curricula to comply with OIE Day-1 competencies, and to improve the quality of veterinary education to global levels.

Keywords: veterinary services, veterinary education, accreditation body, accreditation standards, Asian Association of Veterinary Schools

Introduction

Accreditation of veterinary education establishments (VEEs) is a quality assurance process through which veterinary services and operations are regularly evaluated by an external body to determine if applicable standards are met. If the standards are met, accredited status is granted to the institutions by the accreditation body. In many countries, accreditation is needed for the official recognition of diplomas and veterinary licenses. VEEs are accredited by national as well as regional agencies, and regional accreditation bodies for VEEs are well-established in North America, Europe, and Oceania.

National Accreditation Bodies

The present results are based on the analysis of data from the OIE list of 129 VEEs (1) from 17 countries in South, Southeast, and East Asia. Among these countries, national accreditation systems for VEEs were identified in 10 (59%), but were not found in the remaining 7 countries (41%). In these 10 countries with systems in place, accreditation was conducted by veterinary statutory bodies (Type I), higher education accreditation agencies (Type II), or non-governmental accreditation bodies specialised for VEEs (Type III). Type I VEE accreditation is conducted by a statutory body (e.g., the Veterinary Council of Thailand [VCT]). The VCT promotes specialisation in the veterinary profession and good veterinary practice and ethics, in addition to providing accreditation. Type II VEE accreditation is conducted by private or governmental organisations devoted to the accreditation of higher education institutions in various disciplines, including veterinary medicine. Type III VEE accreditation is conducted by non-governmental accreditation bodies specialised for VEEs, such as that found in South Korea.

The accreditation standards (criteria) employed by the national accreditation agencies in Asia vary in number, from 5 to 11, and in areas of focus, although all agencies include core assessment elements, such as organisation, faculty and staff, facilities, and curriculum. Among the standards of national accreditation bodies, the standards of the Malaysian Veterinary Council are most similar to those of well-established accreditation bodies as in North America or Australasia. The duration of accreditation validity ranges from three to 15 years. Overall, the national accreditation systems of VEEs in Asia differ markedly from country to country.

Regional Accreditation Bodies

A regional accreditation body for the VEEs in Asia has not been established. Currently, the Asian Association of Veterinary Schools (AAVS) is the driving force behind establishing such a body. During the past 15 years, the need for curriculum standardisation and the foundation of a regional accreditation body have been repeatedly recognised in annual meetings of the AAVS. In September 2014, the AAVS prepared a standard curriculum, which is being evaluated by member schools. In December 2015, the AAVS established a new working group chaired by Dr R. Sidik for the curricular standardisation and the development of a regional accreditation body.

Additionally, the demand for a mutual recognition agreement (MRA) for veterinary professionals in the ASEAN countries influences the foundation of a regional accreditation body. Presently, MRAs have been established in eight sectors, including dental and medical services (2). Some VEEs in Asia are also seeking regional accreditation. Two VEEs in Indonesia (Airlangga and Gadjah Mada Universities) have obtained accreditation from the ASEAN University Network Quality Assurance system, although it is not specialised for VEEs. Seoul National University, Hokkaido University and University Putra Malaysia are also seeking accreditation from well-established regional accreditation bodies for VEEs outside Asia (M.H. Bejo & M. Inaba, personal communications, 2015).

Conclusions

Quality veterinary education is the cornerstone supporting effective Veterinary Services (3). Given the importance and urgency of establishing a regional accreditation body for VEEs in Asia, the points to be considered include: (i) establishing national accreditation systems in each member country, as well as a regional accreditation system; (ii) harmonising accreditation standards to be comparable to those of well-established accreditation bodies for VEEs at the national and regional level; (iii) developing specific levels of achievement to assess the OIE Day-1 competencies (1) and other clinical skills as stated by Miller (5); and (iv) creating solutions to overcome significant differences in educational resources among Asian countries so that a regional accreditation system can be applied eventually to VEEs in all the countries.

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