

E is for engagement and efficiency: online training for international continuing education to support foot-and-mouth disease control

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Objectives

Continuing education is crucial to improving the capacity of national veterinary services to prevent or control transboundary animal diseases (TADs) such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). Recent roll-out of global or regional disease control programmes, such as the OIE/FAO Global Strategy for the Control of FMD has posed additional challenges to international organisations seeking to develop international capacity to implement these new tools effectively.

How can we equip all levels of veterinary services, from central to field, with the up to date knowledge and skills needed? How can we foster debate to promote depth of understanding and application at the national level?

To address these questions and respond to high demand for training from across Europe, North Africa and Central Asia, the European Commission for the Control of FMD (EuFMD) has investigated the efficacy of e-learning as a training methodology.

Discussion

E-learning was first added to EuFMD's needs-based training programme in 2013. Since then, more than 1800 veterinarians from 40 countries have taken part in short, tutored online courses, delivered in 6 languages. Some countries have used the courses as part of national staff development programmes. Blended learning approaches have also been used, and informal training provided through regular webinars. Emphasis has been on encouraging interaction between tutors and participants, in local languages.

Evaluation of the online training provision has shown consistently positive feedback and attainment of learning objectives.

Conclusion

Innovative and accessible online training tools are an effective and economical method of training large numbers of veterinarians from diverse countries. Communication between veterinarians in geographically distant locations has promoted vital international collaboration. Disease control experts and central veterinary services have benefitted from connecting with and learning the needs of frontline field practitioners.

Lessons learned should guide development of future resources by EuFMD and others seeking to implement similar initiatives.

Keywords: e-learning – continuing education – transboundary animal diseases