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MANDATES OF OIE REFERENCE LABORATORIES AND COLLABORATING CENTRES

A.A. Schudel

Director, Fundación PROSAIA, Libertad 1240, 1er. Piso, of 30 (1012) Ciudad Autonoma de Buenos Aires, Argentina

Reference Laboratories of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) are required to function as centres of expertise and standardisation, to prepare, store and distribute biological reference materials, to develop new procedures for disease diagnosis and control, to gather, analyse and disseminate epidemiological data, and to provide expert consultancy for the OIE. A number of other activities are also desirable, such as, training, diagnostic testing for other countries, organisation of scientific meetings, and publication of scientific data.

OIE Collaborating Centres are focused on cross-cutting topics rather than specific diseases, and they are not necessarily laboratory-based (although many are). Their mandate relates to operating as a centre for research, expertise, standardisation and dissemination of techniques, the harmonisation of international regulations for animal disease surveillance and control, and the provision of consultant expertise. Again a number of other activities are also desirable, such as training, scientific meetings and publications.

Apart from aquatic animal diseases (which are dealt with by the Aquatic Animal Diseases Commission), the Biological Standards Commission (BSC) assesses applications for Reference Laboratory and Collaborating Centre status, and advises the OIE on their suitability. For established Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, the BSC requests an annual report of their activities. These reports are collated, analysed and published by the OIE each year. The status is reviewed every four years and may be withdrawn if there is insufficient evidence of relevant international activity.

The OIE is keen to establish more Reference Laboratories in developing countries, but this must not be at the expense of scientific competence. To encourage this process, a twinning scheme is being implemented to foster capacity building of the laboratories in developing countries with direct input from established laboratories in developed countries. Where there is more than one OIE Reference Laboratory for a given disease the BSC actively encourages them to interact and, for high profile topics, such as, foot and mouth disease and avian influenza, formal networks have been established. As the OIE advances in effectively supporting the control of animal diseases worldwide, new challenges arise, presenting the opportunity for a periodic revision and adaptation of the mandate of its Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres in order to better fulfil its task. As examples of the dynamics of the process, 'twinning' and 'networking' were formally discussed during the First OIE International Conference of Reference Laboratories and Collaborating Centres, which was held in Florianópolis, Brazil, in December 2006, and now they have been successfully implemented.

As of January 2010, the World network of OIE Reference Laboratories (186) and Collaborating Centres (35) covers 133 Diseases/Topics and are distributed in 41 countries.



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