



Veterinary education on the move for a world that's well protected

15/01/2009 Over 90 of the OIE's Member Countries, for the most part developing and in-transition countries in all regions of the world, have already invited the OIE to conduct an independent evaluation of their national animal health systems. The OIE conducts these evaluations using its "Performance of Veterinary Services" tool (PVS tool), based on 40 criteria each with 5 levels of quality.

The evaluations conducted so far have revealed a wide variety of shortcomings in the countries visited with respect to the OIE's international standards of quality. Nevertheless, the overall impression is that the veterinary education curricula in many countries are failing to keep pace with those countries' requirements in terms of capacity of the Veterinary Services in the fields of animal disease surveillance, including zoonoses, and early detection of infectious disease outbreaks and rapid response. These requirements – all too often unmet – also include food safety inspection, animal welfare and environmental protection. Furthermore, in addition to technical excellence, veterinarians involved in national animal health systems need a far broader general education to give them a better grasp of the mechanisms of governance at both the national (legislation, chain of command, budget, communication) and international level (Organisations, international standards). Also, in view of the ever increasing threats that zoonoses represent it is of utmost importance that veterinarians ensure a leading role within control strategies in cooperation with all relevant sectors, especially the medical world.

Given that the Veterinary Services, as defined by the OIE, encompass both the public and private sector components of national animal health systems, the whole of the veterinary profession needs to be involved in meeting these requirements, which have such crucial worldwide implications.

The evaluations carried out so far also highlight the considerable need that exists for continuing professional education, to ensure that the relevant know-how of all those involved is constantly updated to keep pace with these new requirements.

It is important therefore to ensure that, at a worldwide level, initial and continuing veterinary education provides everyone with curricula designed to meet the needs of society as a whole, rather than being based solely on the current demands of the labour market, which can vary from one moment to another and from one country to another.

To contribute to this important topic, the OIE has decided to hold a Conference, on 12, 13 and 14 October 2009, and invite the deans of all the world's veterinary universities and schools (estimated at 500), along with the institutional managers in charge of developing veterinary teaching programmes in Member Countries and Territories, to discuss these issues and agree on a minimum curriculum for all veterinarians, whatever educational establishment in the world provides the initial training. Indeed, it is important to reach a global consensus

on what steps can be taken to stop certain countries awarding 'third-rate' veterinary diplomas and ensure that these diplomas are delivered on the basis of effective high level know-how that meets societal needs. Representatives of the various direct beneficiaries of animal health and animal welfare programmes (animal producers, processors, consumers, other non-governmental organisations) will also be welcome at the Conference.

The question of what mechanisms can be used to monitor the content and quality of training will also be raised during the Conference as the starting point for discussions on which mechanisms to recommend for the future.

I should also like to point out that OIE standards already recognise National Veterinary Statutory Bodies as the institutions responsible for, inter alia, guaranteeing the appropriate level of involvement and quality of veterinarians and veterinary para-veterinarians in national animal health systems. This essential role will be highlighted and explained during the Conference. We fervently hope that the Conference will lead to a shared commitment to work towards a truly global mechanism aimed at stimulating and supervising at a world level the exhaustiveness and quality of initial and continuing veterinary education curricula. Ultimately, this will help all countries of the world to be better prepared to deal with emerging health risks.

We look forward to welcoming you to our Conference!

Bernard Vallat