

Veterinary Education in the Middle East

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The rapid and the wide occurrence of transboundary animal diseases (TADs) including those of public health, food security and food safety concerns, have highlighted the need to improve veterinary education and encourage the establishment of continuing education programs that ensure prompt and proper response of veterinarians to new threats on national, regional and global levels. Highly qualified veterinarians are key to fight against priority TADs. Unfortunately, the quality of veterinary education varies greatly in the Middle East and around the world. There is a need for assessment and revision of veterinary education on a regular basis to ensure the quality of graduates. Assessment can be based on feedback from graduates and stakeholders, including livestock producers, and the community. In addition to considering whether the number of graduates is adequate, criteria such as staff/student ratio, facilities, equipment, caseloads, services, content of curriculum and involvement in scientific research should be taken into account when assessing the performance of Veterinary Educational Establishments (VEEs).

The number of veterinary colleges in the ME countries has increased to reach 96 in 2016. There is a wide variation in the number of veterinary colleges in each country ranging from 1 and up to 22. A regional conference on improving veterinary education for the Arab Faculties was held in April, 2016 (Jordan) with participation of 30 Deans from Veterinary Colleges. Curricula, teaching methods, numbers of students admitted were discussed in this meeting. The guidelines on the core veterinary curriculum and day 1 competencies based on OIE and European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) standards were addressed. Deans were encouraged to adapt and implement these standards as a first step to improve veterinary education in the region. JUST offered its skills book as template for all participants to be adapted and modified by their schools to monitor the student's skills for day 1 competencies.

All VEEs in ME follow a five-year program (except Iran), where students are directly accepted after finishing high school. Most of the VEEs lack appropriate distribution of the basic and clinical courses in the curriculum (more theoretical than practical). In addition, most colleges have a small role in continuing education. VEEs face several challenges; including, lack of or inadequate governmental support, lack of an accreditation body, student interest and cultural issues regarding veterinary medicine as a career, VEEs have no control on the student number admitted per year and admission criteria. Global harmonization of veterinary education based on OIE guidelines and strengthening the role of Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSBs) in regulating veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals activities are cornerstones of good veterinary governance.

Keywords: veterinary education – Day 1 competencies – core curriculum.