

## **Risk communication: a critical building block in veterinary education**

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Veterinary Services (VS) and their partners play a key role in protecting animal health and welfare. Traditionally, exercising this role relied on “hard”, scientific knowledge and expertise, and an exchange of information within a small circle of animal health stakeholders that focused exclusively on these objectives.

This is no longer the case. There are three factors that caused a shift:

1. The transformation of how citizens access information and influence opinion and politics;
2. Globalisation, rapid circulation of goods, people, animal products and live animals that means it is no longer sufficient that protective animal health and welfare measures are handled by a closely defined, local groups of stakeholders; and
3. The surge of terrorism that increases the risk that biological science may be misused to cause harm.

As a consequence, today Veterinary Services personnel need to be able to respond directly to increased demand for immediate expert advice, listen and acknowledge concerns voiced by populations in appropriate ways. VS need to be able to communicate health risks and responsibilities of stakeholders such as health professionals, farmers, scientists, civil society, communities, media and others who are largely unfamiliar with the scientific knowledge of the world of animal health.

To address the above challenges, the skillset and toolbox of both animal health and public health professionals need to be expanded: “Soft skills” are required that ensure collaboration and a constant flow of relevant information with key stakeholders and concerned bodies outside the animal health sector. Risk communication skills, tools and approaches need to become critical building blocks in veterinary education.

OIE and WHO have joined forces to facilitate this educational shift in four ways:

1. Risk communication training curricula and tools have been developed for Continuing Veterinary Services Education;
2. Joint work is underway “translating” technical knowledge into accessible formats and language that can be understood and acted upon by broad groups of stakeholders in support of veterinary medicine’s risk communication efforts;
3. “Applicable” guidance and skills will be made available to seasoned practitioners and students through Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs); and
4. Through scientific research into risk communication experience and principles, WHO Guidelines are being developed that will form the basis for the integration of risk communication into public health university educational curricula and will be adapted to animal health in collaboration with the OIE.

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