



FEDERATION OF VETERINARIANS OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN VETERINARY WEEK 2009

Animal and human health: a public good

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Brussels, 28 September – “The recent outbreaks of avian influenza have highlighted once more the link between animal and public health and the importance of veterinary and medical sectors working in a coordinated way”, recalled Androulla Vassiliou, EU Commissioner for Health. Speaking at the opening conference of the EU Veterinary Week 2009 – a joint initiative of DG Sanco and the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) – she pointed out that his year’s event also marked the launch of the consultation on the future EU Animal Health Law.

“Animal health and human health are public goods, recalled FVE president Walter Winding during the panel discussion on animal health legislation. “It could therefore be dangerous to defer the responsibility entirely to the private sector. While parts of it can be transferred, the essential responsibility for public goods shall remain with the state!” This concern was echoed by Sue Davies, of the UK consumers’ organisation ‘Which?’, speaking on BSE and other food safety crises from a consumer’s viewpoint. She voiced her concern about the possible transfer of responsibility for food safety to the private food operators themselves. “We should learn from the lessons of BSE”, she said, calling for more transparency and effective enforcement.

28 September was also World Rabies Day, recalled Thomas Müller, of the German WHO¹ Collaborating Centre for Rabies Surveillance and Research. “Rabies is the neglected disease of poverty”, he reminded. Most of the 55,000 deaths due to rabies each year affect the world’s poorest countries. He called for data-driven assessment for an estimate of true incidence, in order to break the ‘circle of neglect’ perpetuated by ignorance and complacency.

“We should learn to think outside the box when it comes to influenza”, stressed Iliaria Capua of the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale delle Venezie (Italy). We should challenge the dogma that a new pandemic is necessarily of a novel subtype – or that cross-reactivity between antibodies in humans against an animal virus of the same subtype is protective against a novel animal virus. “This dogma has affected our preparedness: we expected an H5 or H7 pandemic, not an H1...” Joint surveillance and research between the human and veterinary components was required, she added, to tackle human and animal health as a collaborative effort.

But an interdisciplinary ‘One Health’ approach should not be limited to avian influenza. Katinka de Balogh, of the FAO² presented the Global strategy for reducing risks of infectious diseases at the animal-human-ecosystems interface. She proposed to allocate the major zoonoses into clusters (Emerging zoonoses, Neglected/endemic zoonoses and Food-borne diseases) and to develop a strategic approach for each cluster.

The ‘One Health’ collaboration between medical and veterinary scientists should be institutionalised, both at government, research laboratories and undergraduate level. “Public health and zoonoses should be taught jointly to veterinary and medical students, encouraging the exchange of expertise and close collaboration”, concluded Walter Winding.

The success of the 2008 and 2009 EU Veterinary Weeks have led the Commission to repeat the initiative, with the next edition planned in June 2010.

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Notes for editors:

- ¹ World Health Organisation
- ² Food and Agriculture Organisation

- The conference presentations are available on the DG Sanco website http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/diseases/strategy/events_en.htm
- An education video on rabies was also presented during the conference, which fell on the same day as the World Rabies Day. The video is available for free download in 29 languages on the following webpage http://ec.europa.eu/food/animal/liveanimals/pets/video_en.htm

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is an umbrella organisation of 50 veterinary organisations from 38 European countries, representing a total of around 200 000 veterinarians.

For further information, consult the FVE website <http://www.fve.org> or contact the FVE Secretariat on tel +32 2 533 70 20 or by e-mail to info@fve.org.