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“ONE HEALTH” ... in Action! [# 8]

The Value of Collaboration Among Health Science Professionals

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This past year has been an honor of a lifetime for me to represent the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the veterinary medical profession around the world.

As I prepared to assume the AVMA presidency, I focused on the AVMA Mission, “Improving Animal and Human Health, Advancing the Veterinary Medical Profession”. I also contemplated the following question: What is the value and responsibility of the veterinary medical profession to our global society?

No other profession has as much impact on the health of both animals and people. I truly believe that animal and public health are at a crossroads. The convergence of animal, human and ecosystem health dictates that the “One world, One health, One medicine” concept must be embraced. The veterinary medical profession has the responsibility to assume a major role in that effort.

It was upon that basis of value to our global society, and that sense of responsibility to the future, that I revealed my vision for a One Health Initiative in July of 2006 as I became AVMA president.

I have traveled the world meeting and talking with veterinarians, physicians, public health professionals, academicians, students, government officials, legislators and other stakeholders about the interrelationship between all health science related professions.

One of the most rewarding relationships which I established this past year has been with American Medical Association (AMA) president Ronald M. Davis, MD, MS, FACPM. Soon after I was installed as AVMA president and Dr. Davis was elected AMA president-elect, I contacted and met with him to share my vision for a One Health Initiative.

As a public health physician and a preventative medicine specialist, Dr. Davis has been a prominent voice on public health issues, including tobacco use, obesity, and vaccinations. During our meeting Dr. Davis readily recognized the potential value for collaboration between our respective professions. Subsequently, I invited him to be a guest speaker at the AVMA Annual Convention in July of 2007.

On April 14, 2007 the AVMA Executive Board took official action to establish the One Health Initiative by approving my recommendation to establish the AVMA One Health Initiative Task Force. I was very pleased that the AVMA on behalf of the veterinary medical profession committed to assume a major leadership role to establish a coordinated mechanism to facilitate collaboration and cooperation among the various health science professions, colleges, governmental agencies and industries with a focus on one world, one health, one medicine.

In June of 2007, following the leadership of Dr. Davis, a resolution was introduced to the AMA House of Delegates by the American College of Preventative Medicine, American College of Occupational and Environmental Health, American Association of Public Health Physicians, and Academy of Pharmaceutical Physicians and Investigators. The resolution called for the AMA to support a One Health Initiative designed to promote collaboration between human and veterinary medicine and to engage in a dialogue with the AVMA to discuss means of enhancing collaboration in medical education, clinical care, public health and biomedical research.

It was indeed a privilege to be invited by Dr. Davis to the AMA Annual Meeting and granted the opportunity to testify before the AMA House of Delegates Reference Committee which considered this resolution. I was extremely pleased that the AMA House of Delegates passed this resolution unanimously. I am particularly grateful for the leadership taken by Dr. Davis following our initial contact and communication.

At the AMA Annual Meeting, Lonnie J. King, DVM, MS, MPA, director of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC), National Center for Zoonotic, Vector-Borne and Enteric Diseases (ZVED), and I were invited to address the AMA Student Medical Section concerning the integration of animal, human and ecosystem health. Dr. King is serving as chair of the One Health Initiative Task Force. Nurturing student involvement and leadership in the One Health Initiative is vitally important to our future.

The Student AVMA has established a One Health Challenge program, which this year supported World Rabies Day. All student chapters of the AVMA participated in an event promoting rabies prevention through educational symposia, community fundraisers, and athletic events. Serving as valuable members of the AVMA One Health Initiative Task Force will be the Student AVMA president Justin Sabota, a University of Florida fourth year veterinary medical student, and Travis Meyer, a Pennsylvania State University second year medical student.

It was extremely gratifying that this year's 144th Annual AVMA Convention provided a venue at our nation's capital [Washington, D.C., USA] for the culmination of a multitude of actions and presentations, which not only supported the One Health concept, but created further momentum for the One Health Initiative. The One Health concept was highlighted during the opening session when Julie L. Gerberding, MD, MPH, director of the CDC and administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, gave the keynote address. Dr. Gerberding said that veterinarians and physicians must present a seamless front to protect human and animal health in a small world.

Special sessions were held which centered on the One Health concept. One focused on emerging global animal health threats and included a presentation by United States Ambassador John E. Lange, who is the nation's representative on avian and pandemic influenza and heads the U.S. State Department's Avian Influenza Action Group. Another session featured Anthony S. Fauci, MD, the renowned researcher on AIDS and HIV, who is director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH).

At the convention Dr. Davis and I participated in a joint press conference concerning the One Health Initiative. Following the press conference we both presented together in a collaborative session, "One Medicine – Fly Under One Flag". We were joined at this session by Jarbas Barbosa, MD, head of Health Surveillance and Disease Management of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

We are now approaching the first AVMA One Health Initiative Task Force meeting which will be held November 27-28 to be followed by a second meeting at the end of January, 2008. I consider this Task Force as the first step, and most critically important, of the One Health Initiative. I envision the success of this Task Force will lead to an integrated national strategy, and ultimately an international strategy, for One Health-One Medicine. The Task Force is comprised of thirteen, visionary individuals with an appreciation for the One Health concept who are excellent collaborators and communicators. Serving as liaisons to the Task Force will be myself, Dr. Davis, and Jay Glasser, MD representing the AVMA, AMA and American Public Health Association (APHA), respectively.

It has been very heartening to experience so much commitment of support for the One Health Initiative during this past year. By uniting our professions with a common focus, we can convert our 21st century challenges into opportunities for the benefit of our global society.

It is now my fervent hope and vision that we as health science professionals will assume our collaborative responsibility to protect and promote our immeasurable value, to utilize that value to its fullest, and to make sure that our future is a promising future, a future of even greater value.

One World, One Health, One Medicine...that, my colleagues, translates to value.