



Learning today, preserving our future

4th OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education Bangkok (Thailand) 22-24 June 2016

KEYNOTE SPEECH

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On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in Paris. Article 26 of the Declaration states that “Everyone has the right to education”.

1. Education is a right, and equitable access to quality education for all children, boys as well as girls, is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations.
2. Teaching is an integral component of economic and social development, and Amartya Sen, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics 1998, has clearly demonstrated that access to education is a condition for, rather than a consequence of, economic development.
3. More specifically, scientific higher education is a requirement for progress through technological innovation. Thus, at the World Conference on Higher Education, organised by UNESCO in October 1998, which resulted in the adoption of the World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century, it was already noted that higher education is everywhere faced with great challenges and difficulties, including with regard to financing, the enhancement and preservation of the quality of education, but also the possibility of equitable access to the benefits of international cooperation.

Therefore, anyone seeking to tackle the problems facing the developing world should keep in mind the following two realities:

- Firstly, none of the problems – be they food shortages or the spread of diseases – can be addressed without the use of science and technology;
- Secondly, the capacity to apply science to development depends on the competencies that people have acquired and sustained through a robust and effective higher education system and a personal commitment to life-long learning.

Thus, for the OIE, support for good quality veterinary education contributes to tackling the major challenges that consist of combating poverty and hunger, preserving the health of animal populations and protecting the environment and biodiversity.

The OIE also recognizes that in order for science and technology to be fully considered in good public policy and informed decision making, there is a need for the development of competencies beyond biological science in areas such communication, economics, interpersonal and negotiation skills in order to engage and sustain interest at the political level.



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The core mandate of the OIE is the improvement of animal health, and strengthening the capacities of national Veterinary Services is one of the pillars of our actions to fulfil our mandate. To this end, the OIE elaborates and then submits to the World Assembly standards on the quality of national Veterinary Services, which are currently compiled in Section 3 of the *Terrestrial Code*. It is worth noting that Article 3.1.2. lists the fundamental principles of quality of Veterinary Services, which among others include professional judgement, impartiality, integrity and objectivity.

Yet how can such principles be complied with if the men and women in charge of supervising or providing veterinary services have neither the necessary competencies nor qualifications, capacities that can only be acquired through appropriate education?

Furthermore, how can we respond to the societal, economic and environmental changes that have affected the requirements for veterinary services and veterinary capability, without well-educated staff?

Already in 2009, in the Preface to the issue of the OIE *Scientific and Technical Review* on 'Veterinary education for global animal and public health', the Director General of the OIE emphasised that *"One of the most critical questions currently facing veterinary medicine is that of how to improve global veterinary public health. Change is needed in all segments of veterinary education – locally, nationally and globally – if global veterinary public health is to be improved"*.

Several steps towards making the necessary changes have been identified:

1. Establishing the essential elements of global veterinary public health training for all veterinarians, namely the areas of knowledge and competence that all veterinarian students should have acquired by the time they graduate, which could also serve as ground-level training for those who will have to implement the OIE standards and guidelines;
2. Establishing the training needs for global veterinary public health specialists;
3. Providing veterinary students with an appreciation of the relationship between veterinary medicine and the other health professions: professional cooperation in this domain is crucial, in particular when we have to implement the One Health concept in daily life;
4. Creating curriculum change to meet the challenge of few teaching staff, an ever expanding platform of scientific knowledge and technologies, the wide range of animal species that need to be covered and a greater range of critical areas to be considered. Thus, hearing about modern teaching approaches could provide some useful insight into new directions that we could follow;



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5. Encouraging students to enter into careers in global veterinary public health; at this point in my speech, let me also highlight a specific concern related to the increasingly urban mentality which is developing in the profession and veterinary education. We have to preserve food animal veterinary education and rural practice, because veterinarians are the key actors not only for animal health and population medicine, but also for food safety from the farm to the consumer's table.

6. Validation: once curriculum changes have been implemented over a satisfactory period of time, it is important to conduct an analysis to determine whether they have produced the intended results. Unfortunately, such evaluations are all too rarely undertaken and we must continue to encourage this approach.

Thus, although the OIE does not have a mandate to intervene in the definition of veterinary education and its evaluation, which are the remit of universities or *statutory* bodies, it was nevertheless important for the Organisation to be able to provide Deans and professors in charge of veterinary education guidance on specific requirements relating to the activities of the Veterinary Services. The working group set up for this purpose undertook the task between 2010 and 2012 and guidelines and recommendations have been available since 2013.

Good quality veterinary education is therefore an essential component of any strategy aimed at strengthening the governance of Veterinary Services.

I should like to point out that in recent years the OIE has undertaken a number of actions which, together, are contributing to this objective of good governance:

- The elaboration of standards, and especially Section 3 of the *Terrestrial Code* and its chapters 3.1. and 3.2. on evaluation of Veterinary Services, which I have already referred to;
- The design and implementation of the procedure for evaluating national Veterinary Services (the 'PVS Pathway') with its various components: thus, one of the four pillars of the evaluation is entirely devoted to human resources, and especially Section 1-2 on the competencies of veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals with respect to their initial and continuing training;
- The twinning programmes that exist for laboratories, veterinary education establishments and veterinary statutory bodies.



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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having reminded you of this general context, let me briefly review the issues discussed at the past three Global Conferences organised by the OIE, and the subsequent progress achieved.

- At the first Global Conference, held in Paris in October 2009, it was noted that there was no common understanding of what veterinarians are. Thus, after the 1st Conference, an *ad hoc* Group was convened to address some of the Conference recommendations, including the establishment of a set of Day 1 Competencies, which are applicable globally.
- At the 2nd Conference, held in Lyon in May 2011, feedback was provided on various topics, including on how to assess whether the Day 1 Competencies are being implemented. The Model Core Curriculum was then developed to help integrate the Day 1 Competencies into the teaching curriculum. The OIE Veterinary Education establishment (VEE) Twinning Programme, based on the experience of the OIE Laboratory Twinning Programme, was launched to help VEEs in developing countries align their curriculum with the Day 1 Competencies and the Model Core Curriculum.
- At the 3rd Conference, held in Foz do Iguazu in December 2013, much of the discussion concerned the use of the tools (i.e., the Day 1 Competencies, the Model Core Curriculum and the VEE Twinning Programme). It also focused on strengthening the role of Veterinary Statutory Bodies (VSBs) in supporting better veterinary education.

Today, this fourth Conference on veterinary education organised by the OIE is aimed at reviewing the implementation of the OIE guidelines which have been developed to ensure the excellence of the veterinary profession.

Thus the Conference will:

- look at the follow up to the recommendations approved during the previous conferences, held in Paris, Lyon and Foz do Iguazu,
- analyse the current situation on veterinary education worldwide, including the use of OIE recommendations on the competencies of graduating veterinarians and the OIE guidelines on a veterinary core curriculum.

The conference will also give us the opportunity:

- to discuss how the VEE accreditation bodies take into account OIE guidelines and recommendations;
- to review the experiences of OIE Member Countries in the domain of veterinary education, in particular with OIE veterinary education twinning projects; and therefore to discuss how to improve the twinning procedures, if needed.



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In addition, specific sessions will open the debate:

- on future needs, priorities and ways to strengthen veterinary education based on closer relationships between Veterinary Authorities, VEEs and VSBs;
- and we will consider whether some “non-veterinary” disciplines should also be taught in order to enhance veterinarians’ skills and understanding, such as leadership, communication and economics, and not only during the initial education but also during continuous learning.

And lastly, let me point out that we will also be examining a very important issue, namely the actions to be taken to harmonise and improve the capacities of veterinary para-professionals working under the responsibility and supervision of veterinarians.

Indeed, as already pointed out during the regional conference that we organised in Pretoria in October 2015, veterinary para-professionals carry out a wide range of activities at various stages in the food production chain: working with animal producers, but also at abattoirs and processing plants, and not forgetting diagnostic laboratories. In many countries, the crucial role they play, due to their daily contact with other professionals, is clearly recognised: they provide valuable support for veterinarians, who are often too few to fulfil all their animal health or veterinary public health missions. It is consequently important to consider their level of initial training and the minimum competencies they need to acquire through their training curricula.

While the OIE supports the implementation of large-scale control strategies for major diseases (including foot and mouth disease, Peste des Petits ruminants and rabies), it is therefore important today to focus on veterinary para-professionals.

Conclusion

The horizon of veterinary science is broad....and in light of the changing world in which we live in and the pace of the change, it will continue to expand. We must therefore continue to push our ability to meet the complex challenges that are emerging and will continue to emerge but not to do so in isolation.

We need to ensure a profession that is both capable and adaptable, that has both clinical skills and political savvy, that is prepared for known and potentially unknown hazards, that can be both a leader and a team player with other health professionals and paraprofessionals, that is respected for its commitment to health and food security, animal welfare, economic prosperity and for protecting our animal resources in order to preserve our future.

After all, as we all know, real doctors treat more than one species!