



## 2011, a landmark year for the veterinary profession around the world

*In 1761, Claude Bourgelat managed to persuade King Louis XV of France of the need to train specialists to treat animal diseases.*

By decision of the King, the world's first veterinary school was established in Lyons, France. Bourgelat was a true visionary. He had secured the King's support because rinderpest was ravaging Europe's countryside and ruining the rural economy. At that time, horse health was crucial to a powerful army and Bourgelat must surely have argued this to support his case.

Bourgelat also pioneered the concept of comparative pathobiology between humans and animals. He was the first to claim that animal diseases could usefully be studied to gain a better understanding of human diseases. The 'One Health' concept was born!

After Lyons, a host of veterinary schools were opened in France, Europe and worldwide, based on the Lyons model. Gradually the veterinary profession earned general recognition for its contribution, first from rural dwellers and later from the rest of the society on account of veterinarians' widely diverse skills. An understanding of living creatures in both their normal and malfunctioning states opens many doors to intelligence, knowledge and know-how indeed.

In addition to their well-known role as animal doctors, veterinarians have proved their ability to design programmes for the prevention and control of infectious diseases, including those transmissible to humans through contact or ingesting food. The veterinary profession's contribution to public health is now universally acknowledged as vital.

Today, recognition extends to the way the veterinary profession supports the improvement of animal production by controlling diseases, in order to help to meet soaring world demand for first-class protein, especially in developing countries. In this way, the veterinary profession enables hundreds of millions of the world's poorest livestock producers to safeguard their sole capital – their animals – and helps to promote access for their animal products to more lucrative export markets by safeguarding world trade in animals and animal products.

No further proof is required of the social benefit of companion animals or the essential role of veterinarians as doctors of these companions for men.

Unfortunately the veterinary profession is not always able to convey the message that its activities represent a real Global Public Good. Therefore the 250th anniversary of the veterinary profession in 2011 provides a unique opportunity to put the message across.

The OIE has been heavily involved in the World Veterinary Year 2011 (Vet 2011) celebrations by helping to organise some key events, including the official launch on 24 January 2011 at Château de Versailles (where Louis XV resided), alongside the Directors-General of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Indeed, the veterinary profession is spearheading the worldwide effort to implement OIE objectives in the fields of animal health and welfare, as well as veterinary public health, world trade security, food safety, scientific research and poverty reduction.

The OIE has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the European Commission for a joint public awareness campaign in 2011 based on producing videos on the role of veterinarians in every citizen's daily life, plus brochures, in addition to staging photo competitions and fielding stands at world events such as Green Week in Berlin and the Paris International Agricultural Show (Salon de l'Agriculture), the World Conference on Veterinary Education at the Lyons veterinary school (École Vétérinaire de Lyon) in May 2011 and the World Veterinary Congress in Cape Town, South Africa, in October 2011.

I call upon all readers of this editorial, both veterinarians and non-veterinarians alike, to support this public awareness campaign to help further the many crucial ties that exist between animals and humans of the world.

For more information, visit the website of World Veterinary Year 2011 at: [www.vet2011.org](http://www.vet2011.org)

**Bernard Vallat**