

Prudent use of antibiotics

Communique from the SAVC

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The South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) as the statutory body for the veterinary and para-veterinary professions, has through discussions and local and international meetings become aware of the risks that resistance to antibiotics pose to both animal and human health globally. International documented opinion revealed that antimicrobial resistance is viewed as one of the top three threats to the human race together with global warming and overpopulation.

Various international organizations, organizations that represent the different branches of the livestock industry, veterinary associations and veterinary statutory bodies have adopted strategies or developed guideline documents for the responsible use of antibiotics for the treatment or control of bacterial infections. These initiatives attest to the growing global awareness of the immediate and growing threat of antimicrobial resistance.

The SAVC fully endorses the viewpoints that encourage the prudent use of antibiotics in animals. In this respect, the SAVC appeals to members of the veterinary and para-veterinary professions to embrace antibiotic stewardship principles to diminish the need for antibiotics in animal husbandry. This objective must be achieved by means of appropriate prescribing and dispensing, basing administration of antibiotics on bacterial sensitivity testing when possible, preventing infection through strict biosecurity procedures, and education of and communication with animal owners and animal protein industries on the risk of the over-use or inappropriate use of antibiotics. On a more practical level, education of and communication with animal owners should include improvement of animal health through improved sanitation and on-farm hygiene, provision of access to clean water and optimal nutrition that will benefit animal health and optimising vaccination programmes.

The SAVC is mindful of the tension between access and excess of antibiotics in animal husbandry, and that there is a need to balance antibiotic use policies with animal welfare and food security concerns. Notwithstanding, the SAVC encourages meaningful reduction of the prescription and dispensing of antibiotics for all animal species. The SAVC is opposed to the use of antibiotics in the feed and water of food-producing animals for growth promotion, and supports the termination of compounding of antibiotics for food-producing animals. Antibiotics should only be used in the food and water of food-producing animals for therapy and metaphylaxis under veterinary oversight when required for a particular disease outbreak. The ultimate objective is for members of the profession to only prescribe and dispense antibiotics for all animal species under their care when truly needed. ■