

The South African Veterinary Council embraces One Health

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The first global annual One Health Day is scheduled to take place on the 3rd of November 2016 to promote efforts around the world to bring together all human, animal and environmental health disciplines (www.onehealthday.org). The objective is to raise awareness about the One Health approach to complex health problems involving people, animals and the environment. In support of this initiative, it is appropriate for the veterinary and para-veterinary professions to be aware of the SAVC's support for the One Health concept.

There are several definitions documented for One Health, but in its most basic description the One Health approach recognizes the relationships between human, animal and environmental health, and applies interdisciplinary tools to solve complex public health problems. The traditional public health model deals with health issues in the context of animal and human populations and the environment in which they occur, with a recognition that there are interfaces where at times these domains may overlap. In contrast, the One Health concept supports a position that states that the health of animals, humans and the environment are interlinked and not limited to interfaces, and that disease problems impacting the health of humans, animals, and the environment must be solved through improved communication, cooperation, and collaboration across disciplines and institutions.

Why should the SAVC concern itself with the One Health concept?

Traditional approaches and past requisite skills and levels of knowledge may not be commensurate with the rapid changes and new demands of food-animal industries and the shifting requirements needed for public health, biomedical research and the global food system (KPMG study, 1999). It has been documented that of the 1,461 diseases now recognized in humans, approximately 60% are due to multi-host pathogens characterized by their movement across species lines (Torrey EF, Yolken RH, 2005. *Beasts of the Earth*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press). In addition, over the last three decades, approximately 75% of new emerging human infectious diseases have been zoonotic (Taylor LH, Latham SM, Woolhouse ME, 2001. Risk factors for human disease emergence. *Philos Trans R Soc Lond B Biol Sci*, 356: 983-989). More efforts are therefore made to address zoonotic diseases in an interdisciplinary way as exemplified by the recent diagnosis of human *Brucella melitensis* infection in the Western Cape (Wojno et al, 2016). The authors of this publication emphasized the need for strengthening integration between public health, medical and veterinary services and exposing deficiencies in public health, veterinary and laboratory practices.

The control of infectious diseases is central to One Health. Our increasing interdependence with animals and their products may well be the single most critical risk factor to our health and well-being with regard to infectious diseases. The One Health approach is not however, limited to infectious diseases, as non-communicable conditions are also crossing species with adverse effects to both animals and humans, e.g. climate change, agro- and bio-terrorism, obesity and toxicities.

The World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) of the UN and the World Health

Organization (WHO) emphasized in its tripartite 2010 policy statement that Member States must enhance and support the integration of animal, human and environmental health for the mutual benefit of all.

The SAVC as the statutory body for the veterinary and para-veterinary professions has a responsibility to ensure that veterinarians and para-veterinarians registered by the Council are sufficiently informed to be able to play meaningful roles in multidisciplinary teams dealing with high impact diseases at interfaces. To achieve this objective, the SAVC plays an oversight role to ensure that the One Health agenda is incorporated into the veterinary and para-veterinary curricula.

The SAVC also encourages veterinary interest groups and branches of the different veterinary associations to consider the participation of environmentalists, ecologists, health professionals in its meetings/conferences where aspects of One Health are included in the agenda. An excellent example of this approach is the upcoming World Small Animal Veterinary Association's symposium entitled "Preventing obesity in people and their pets: a One Health approach" (www.wsava-obesity.com). The vision for the outcome of this meeting, is a world where regular activity, a balanced diet and healthy weight are part of every family's life.

The South African Veterinary Council has also shown its commitment to the control of resistance to antimicrobial drugs when it signed the Antimicrobial Resistance National Strategy Framework, thereby linking it with several organizations in the human health and environmental domains that will work towards resistance control in the future. Resistance to antimicrobial drugs is today arguably the biggest One Health issue on the globe, and the SAVC has positioned itself through its Food Safety and Food Security Committee to collaborate with other regulatory and professional organisations in activities that address the antimicrobial drug dispensing and prescribing behaviour of its members, including training opportunities as part of continuing professional development.

In the final analysis, the SAVC supports the expansion of the trans-disciplinary networks of all veterinarians and para-veterinarians, and a greater awareness of the interconnectivity of human, animal and environmental health. ■