

INTERSECTORAL AND INTERDISCIPLINARY ASPECTS IN THE LOCAL VETERINARY ATTENTION SYSTEMS

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SUMMARY. The veterinary attention systems are undergoing profound changes characterized by the producers' growing participation in various animal health campaigns, particularly in the control of foot-and-mouth disease. This process is viewed as part of the administrative decentralization of a significant number of sanitary activities. Animal-health attention and participation at the local level have become a stimulus and a necessity, enabling the institutions involved in the agricultural and livestock-raising activities to coordinate efforts to promote development. Moreover, there is a growing demand that technical personnel from the various disciplines participate more fully in the drafting and follow-through of work plans and livestock-related research plans within the system's geographic scope. Their participation should focus on dealing with the sanitary problems jointly with the aspects related to the livestock industry's productivity and profitability.

The systems of veterinary attention are defined as groups of private and public institutions that produce activities organized to act on the profiles of farm animals' health and public health. The systems materialize the specific policies through the execution of actions and services organized in accordance with the global guidelines and strategies planned in each country, and within the context of their productive and social systems (11,12).

The animal-health veterinary attention systems have diversified into three sectors: (a) official veterinary service, (b) veterinary services operated by cooperatives or by integrated production agencies, and (c) private attention.

As the alternative producing the best results in the activities involving the prevention, control

and eradication of animal diseases, recent years have favored the configuration of veterinary attention systems operating at the local level.

The initiative that the producers have assumed in various countries through their organizations plays a decisive role in this task. Likewise, the actions generated by this phenomenon promotes changes in the organizational and financial aspects, and prods the development of sanitary assistance mechanisms (vaccination, control of outbreaks and of animal transit) and of the epidemiological surveillance and information systems.

Two central aspects of this scenario are the participation of the diverse sectors directly or indirectly committed to promoting animal health, inasmuch as it depends on general determining factors (13), and the inclusion of the distinct disciplines that, from multiple methodological perspectives, explain the origin of animal health problems, their evolution, and the social and institutional mechanisms for modifying certain undesirable states.

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STRENGTHENING OF LOCAL VETERINARY ATTENTION AND INTERSECTORAL ASPECTS

The veterinary attention systems tend to consolidate at the local level due to the impact of two converging phenomena: the crisis in the Latin American states that is materialized in their inability to generate the quantity and quality of goods and services offered in preceding decades; and, on the other hand, the perception that the centralized and vertical models of attention stifle progress in the tasks of eradicating diseases critical to the production and trade of farm animals and their by-products.

The deterioration of the public veterinary services, a characteristic of the last ten years, and their excessive degree of centralization and bureaucratization, underscored the already limited effective capacity to introduce, within the livestock-raising sector, significant modifications in animal production and health.

As an outgrowth of this situation, a fatigue was produced that has affected the sanitary labors of the personnel who render the veterinary services and dampened the motivation of the social segments related to the livestock industry.

In several countries a new concept is being developed which creates an environment of reciprocal responsibilities between the public veterinary services and the beneficiaries at the local levels. These responsibilities are viable to materialize, mobilizing all the local resources, in order for the sanitary operations to become more effective, efficient and timely, in response to the real needs of the livestock activity of the area.

To the extent that the capacity of analysis is developed, along with an understanding of the livestock-producing reality and the animal-health situation at the local level, and the services existing for the production of veterinary attention services are identified and coordinated, the way is opened to offering a greater response to the problems of animal production (9).

Proposals for technical and administrative reorientation of veterinary attention have been

formulated (7). The strengthening of the local sanitary operations and the ensuing development of social participation and of intersectoral coordination at that level have been regarded as instruments for attaining greater effectiveness in the action implemented and greater efficiency in administrative activities.

From the point of view of the state, this concept is a response to requirements to decentralize the official apparatus, in search of wider social participation and effective action. This organizational reorientation pursues a greater capability to respond, in line with geographic and populational criteria, to the changing and specific demands of livestock producers' groups affected by more or less common epidemiological problems.

In order to move ahead with this reorientation, the local mechanism of veterinary attention should have the capacity, within a given populational space, to unite all the available resources on behalf of a better animal sanitary effort.

Intersectoral animal-health action consists of the *coordinated intervention of institutions representing more than one social sector in action destined total or partially to coping with problems more related to animal health*. This action enables veterinary attention to be promoted and developed at the local level, and leads to the mobilization of financial and other kinds of resources in support of the animal-health programs.

In short, the local veterinary attention systems are sustained by the participation of the public and private institutions that yield actions to protect and improve the health of the farm animal populations. Such institutions include the livestock raisers' associations, agroindustries, universities, agricultural research institutes, professional groups, and ministries or secretariats of agriculture. But other sectors of health, education, and government, among others, are essential for the promotion of animal health. Besides, they are direct beneficiaries of the changes in the profiles of the livestock industry's development.

There are certain postulates that serve to bring about a better functioning of the management of the local system (3, 5, 6, 8), such as: techni-

cal and administrative decentralization of the management of the resources and of the tactical and operational mechanisms; identification of the veterinary attention's priority needs and drafting of a local strategic plan; administration of health actions like vaccinations, epidemiological surveillance, transit controls, control of outbreaks, etc; and, active participation in executing and evaluating the local strategic plan.

In a scenario of national agricultural and livestock production policies, these systems necessarily tend toward integration with the sanitary programs existing for the control or eradication of animal diseases as well as with other programs involved in the livestock industry's productivity and profitability.

In this context, the universities, especially the schools of veterinary sciences or animal husbandry, possess favorable conditions for incorporating their members into the analyses of the sanitary arena. This fuses the university with the community and enhances the theoretical and practical training of its students while also providing an avenue for funding for the schools.

An updated survey of projects and agreements with national or international organizations, involving the livestock industry, and currently under development in the region, is of vital importance in identifying common objectives that may lead to integrated execution and therefore provide a savings of resources.

The regionalization of the productive systems and the channels of commercialization determine, in their social actors, interests varying according to the stages of animal-health control.

There are experiences whereby agribusiness has incorporated the requirements of sanitary policies established for the acceptance of products like milk and meat, and included in the differentiation of prices according to the health condition, in the assignment of tasks within the local system to its veterinary doctors who provide technical assistance, and in the formation of rotating funds for the acquisition of biological products (2). Also, this is the specific case of laboratories that produce pharmaceutical, chemical and biological products, the

training and promotion of the program's activities and the implementation of tests to assess their products' behavior in the field, of great importance is the contribution that the educational sector or the municipal authorities can lend to a model of animal-health promotion.

In the final instance, the processes that determine a given health profile are a response to problems that highly transcend the specific veterinary attention system (1) and, therefore, demand more complex levels of intervention which require intersectoral action.

In the local animal-production structure, the small proprietors are considered as often concerned with problems that do not always coincide with certain national strategies. Nevertheless, the simple fact of coping with the main problems affecting their production and productivity, and of giving priority to the allocation of public resources toward this sector of the population, favors greater and better participation.

The professional entities, especially the Veterinary Medical Associations make up an important piece in the gearbox of the local veterinary attention services. They contribute their own experiences in the scenario, activities useful for analysis of the health situation and the building of the given plan of strategy. This type of organization is an instrument for tightening the relationship with the social, economic and political sectors, for intervening in the conceiving of proposals for development, for expanding the demand for jobs and for establishing fees and rates for services according to costs, geographical location and type of activity.

Integration of the tasks executed by the Ministries of Health and Agriculture, through the veterinary attention services, is fundamental for a transformation of the health situation. An organization of this nature requires the availability of professionals as "health promoters" thus the importance of training personnel in this discipline and of designing training policies with this content for the national institutions and international technical cooperation agencies.

The local veterinary attention systems configure a fundamental instrument for the setting of policies and strategies in line with the field reality, the political and social organizations, the feasibility of action in harmony with the existing infrastructure, the production systems and the identified epidemiological profile. And they would contribute moreover to achieving the political support that would ensure administrative continuity of their animal health programs and their integration within the policies of development.

The local health systems demonstrate what the practice of intersectorality is and what are the results that can be expected of this process.

INTEPDISCIPLINARITY AND LOCAL VETERINARY ATTENTION

The animal-health phenomena viewed from an epidemiological standpoint are phenomena related to problems studied by the social sciences. Moreover, the social reality in all its complexity requires that it be broached with diverse theoretical, methodological and operational instruments built upon various disciplines.

The cultural, economic, political, geographic, and demographic elements must be added to the biological aspects, inasmuch as they constitute the reality in which the envisaged veterinary attention is to be developed.

The interdisciplinary aspect is implicit in the intersectoral approach, because it provides evidence that the problem of veterinary attention is more than just a problem of species susceptible to various diseases; it is fundamentally a social problem in which there are various actors with varying interests (10).

This approach is especially necessary when the problem is analyzed at the local level, because each social group with specific interests in the livestock-related economic activity has its own "way of seeing and analyzing" a specific problem, vis-à-vis its social and economic efficacy and their interests (4). Considering the explanation for the often-repeated presentation of some animal-health problems and their solutions, a confrontation of

concepts, theories, methods and techniques has been observed in Latin America; this has led to the creation of an environment of conflicts and consensuses among the social actors.

The legitimacy of a form of thought facing society, resolved for those who have the power to make their projects predominate, is also a function of the potentiality of responding to animal-health problems from the standpoint of other social actors and demonstrating superiority on the technological and methodological planes, in reply to other lines of thought.

Legitimizing a body of thought requires, on the other hand, that spaces be occupied and forces accumulated. It also necessitates substantial methodological and technological development. This in turn implies the need to have the capability of assuming all the previous scientific and technical development, redefining it, raising it to a level of greater efficacy and efficiency, and including within it the alternative views of the problem.

As indicated previously, the accumulation of forces is favored by this capability to conceive more advanced and full-range thought about the productive health-animal disease problem. This is a consequence not only of that thought's greater coherence and theoretical strength, but also of a technical capacity superior to that of the other interpretations. Also, it involves a greater capacity to respond to the problems of productive animal health, especially in the aspects perceived as relevant by other social actors, notably those whose exercise of power is needed to render feasible the projects that we value as socially important.

In order to configure the most probable scenario wherein the process of change will develop, one must engage in prospective inference. In this manner one will be able to assess the possible changes that may occur in the several aspects considered (productive level, animal-health problems, risk factors, strategies of transformation).

This approach supposes the development of a veterinary epidemiology with a multidimensional and historical outlook that contemplates the productive, economic, social and political scenarios (6). This field transcends the limits of

epidemiology and calls on other disciplines to explain its behavior.

The recording and use of information related to the productive systems, to agribusiness, to the indicators of morbidity, mortality and animal production, all constitute a fundamental basis for building the plans of strategy and plans for studying the agricultural and livestock-raising sectors within the system's geographic scope. This data provides the private and official professionals with a broader view of the factors determining production and productivity, preventing operations from being concentrated solely on individual clinical cases. Likewise, through interdisciplinary effort, it also promotes the population-level battle against infectious, contagious and parasite-caused diseases and against the problems facing productivity and profitability in the livestock industry.

CONCLUSIONS

The new phase with which veterinary attention efforts will have to cope in Latin America requires increased efficiency by both the official services and the system of attention as a whole.

The advancement of animal health will be sustained by the system's capability to incorporate other socially, politically and economically important institutions. In this sense, the intersectoral approach supposes a complex blending of entities, agencies and organizations having diverse natures and functions, but acting cohesively in pursuit of greater safety and lower costs in achieving the goals proposed by the animal-health services.

With respect to the conception of strategic plans for the animal-health and agricultural and livestock-producing industries' activities, aspects are included that can be explained only by resorting to biology, statistics, epidemiology, economics and planning. But this does not entail a chaotic hodge-podge of disciplines. Rather, it implies a dialectical process that encompasses a subtle underlying web of methodological combinations revealing the transdisciplinary character of the complex object of study, a character implicit in animal health.

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