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REPORT OF THE 10th MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR CONTROL OF RABIES IN LATIN AMERICA (REDIPRA X)

**REPORT OF THE X MEETING OF DIRECTORS OF THE NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR
CONTROL OF RABIES IN LATIN AMERICA (REDIPRA X)**

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SUMMARY

The objectives of the REDIPRA X were:

1. Analyze the achievement of the goal for 2005 of the elimination of human dog transmitted rabies in Latin America.
2. Review the Regional Plan of Elimination of Rabies and to establish strategies for the final phase of stamping out this disease.
3. Define the strategies and activities in order to strengthen canine and wildlife rabies epidemiological surveillance in the region as well as discuss other activities of technical cooperation on this subject.

As authorities of REDIPRA X the following participants were designated unanimously: for the presidency, the representative of the Dominican Republic, Dr. Guillermo Rosario; for the vice-presidency, the representative of the Republic of Bolivia, Dr. Héctor Mencías Gutiérrez; for the secretariat, the representative of the Republic of Chile, Dr. Carlos Pavletic and as the rapporteur, the representative of Honduras, Dr. Reina Teresa Velásquez.

All the official representatives made presentations on the epidemiological situation and the actions that are being carried out in their countries for controlling rabies. Also the following presentations were part of the agenda of the meeting.

Dr. Eduardo Correa Melo presented the epidemiological rabies situation in the Region, the advances in the different programs and the prospects of evolution of the regional situation. Dr. Correa pointed out that the technical guidelines of the current plan are, in general, adequate and sufficient although a formal consolidation of the plan and a greater explicit political commitment are necessary. With respect to the most significant determinants of the persistence of the problem, he pointed out that they are basically institutional and that, although the achievements reached to date are important, in many cases they are not sustainable since there exist threats that, left unattended, can forestall progress and generate more human cases of rabies, postulating the need to establish a political technical instrument in order to give Pan American agreements legal and operational applicability, especially at the local level.

Dr. Cristina Schneider presented the preliminary results of the study of evaluation of the goal for 2005 of elimination of dog-transmitted rabies, pointing out the geographical concentration of the problem and the consequent need for bringing together efforts in localities in which the risk persists.

Dr. Rosely Cerqueira de Oliveira presented the experience of Brazil in the substitution of Fuenzalida-type vaccines by cell culture vaccines that was carried out starting in 2002. In its conclusions, Dr. Cerqueira de Oliveira pointed out that, together with the change of the vaccine, a process of strengthening the system of health care for exposed patients began. Considering the short time elapsed since the process of vaccine change started, Dr. Cerqueira declared that it is premature to advance definitive conclusions, although he pointed out its benefits and probable influence on the reduction of the number of human cases transmitted by dogs.

Dr. Oscar Velásquez Monroy presented the process of certification of free from canine transmitted rabies areas, pointing out that the model makes the control of human and canine rabies sustainable in Mexico, since it becomes possible to maintain and rationalize the assigned social spending. In addition, he pointed out the importance of developing methodologies for evaluating actions against rabies and involving the totality of the society in controlling this disease. Dr. Velásquez also declared that the execution of the decentralized programs is measured in Mexico through an index of performance included in a program known as "Walking towards Excellence in Rabies", which is carried out in each health jurisdiction, trying to attain an outstanding performance in every one of them.

Dr. Charles Rupprecht, representative of the CDC, WHO Collaborating Center in rabies, presented the subject: "Methods, variants, and genotypes of the rabies virus identified in the Americas." Dr. Rupprecht also outlined the activities of horizontal technical cooperation carried out by the CDC and pointed out the advances of the countries in the elimination of dog-transmitted rabies and the wealth of the experiences reported at this REDIPRA and at the previous ones, recommending that such experiences should be sent to relevant scientific publications.

Dr. Lucia Montebello presented the cases of vampire bats transmitted-rabies in the Municipio of Portel (*Pará*, Brazil) in March and April 2004 attended by the Ministry of Health of Brazil, in a cooperative work with the participation of the State of *Pará* and municipal authorities, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Production, the Navy, the Civil Defense, the Secretariat of Social Action, the Pastoral, the Institute Pasteur of São Paulo, the IEC, and the SISPAM. Given the importance of the subject, a special round table was held to discuss alternatives for the prevention of vampire bats-transmitted rabies.

The Representative of El Salvador, Dr. Santiago Ghiringhelo, presented the system for dog aggression registration in El Salvador, pointing out the importance of dog aggression regardless of the epidemiological situation with reference to rabies and other diseases transmitted through dog aggression.

Dr. Cristina Echegoyen made a description of control measures of rabies in the Argentine provinces of Salta and Jujuy, with emphasis on the situation of the municipality of San Salvador de Jujuy where cases of dog rabies appeared after 25 years of epidemiological silence. In her presentation, Dr. Echegoyen emphasized the importance of having had information on dog rabies in the area of Tartagal, which made it possible to speedily enforce the preventive measures for human cases. Despite having controlled the situation, Dr. Echegoyen emphasized that the systems were not strict due to the false perception of absence of risks and that the implementation of the planned measures was difficult although they were able to bring them about. During the outbreak 5,800 attacked people were treated, 80,000 dogs were vaccinated, and the campaign of education and promotion was intensified.

Dr. Oscar Larghi, temporary consultant of Panaftosa, presented the report of two meetings held in Rio de Janeiro in the month of October 2004. The first, with regard to rabies vaccines for humans and the second with reference to the laboratory network of rabies of the Region. Dr. Larghi pointed out the agreement reached with respect to the importance of supporting the countries in adopting modern vaccines and in consolidating horizontal cooperation that some national laboratories are providing under the coordination of PAHO.

Dr. Albino Belotto presented the subject "Strategic vision of surveillance, prevention and control of rabies in the countries of the Americas." He pointed out that, although there has been progress with regard to dog-transmitted rabies, it is indispensable to advance toward those areas where dog-to-dog transmission of rabies is either confirmed or presumed. With respect to rabies transmitted through vampire bats he pointed out that, although the situation is not new, the number of cases reported in 2004 is troubling, and urged the directors of programs to alert the respective ministries of health and agriculture to act jointly and lead cooperative efforts of all the areas and levels of government and of the civil society to reduce the causes of rabies risk. In this regard, he stressed the importance of consolidating Pan American action.

Dr. François-Xavier Meslin referred to the meeting held in Geneva for the review of the VIII Report of Experts in Rabies of WHO pointing out some aspects of the report that will soon be published. Furthermore, Dr. Meslin congratulated the national directors of the rabies programs of Latin America for the important progress achieved and stated that the work performed in the Americas benefits the entire world as a model and inspiration, in particular for those countries of Africa and Asia where dog rabies prevails.

Nevertheless, Dr. Meslin warned that many countries of Latin America have reached a critical point in the implementation of their respective programmes because after decades of extensive efforts no more human cases are diagnosed and national authorities start questioning the need for further spending in the area. To secure a continued political commitment to dog rabies elimination becomes essential to ensure that the improvements that have been obtained over 20 years are not lost. This generates the risk of expensive recurrences, affirmed Dr. Meslin, and, in this regard, he augured that the next RIMSA will turn out a milestone in the fight against rabies in the region in which the ministers should back the regional program and the national actions related to it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Regional Plan:

To present to the RIMSA 14 a provisional draft of a regional plan of measures for the control of rabies to be used in the programming and monitoring of activities against rabies in the countries of the region, for which:

- The technical secretariat is entrusted to PAHO/WHO and it is agreed to establish a virtual communication mechanism for the drafting of the provisional draft, to be presented at RIMSA.
- The regional plan will be based on: WHO recommendations, the document “Strategy and action plan for the elimination of urban rabies” approved in the REDIPRA held in Guayaquil in 1983, the experts’ reports and the recommendations of the working group sessions of the REDIPRA.
- The plan will emphasize the progress recorded in the “Evaluation of the Goal of Elimination of Rabies in 2005” which demonstrates the proximity to the elimination of human dog-transmitted rabies (by variants 1 and 2).
- Among the actions of the plan, starting immediately, the continuity of the activities developed by PAHO for the assessment of the achievement of the goal of elimination of dog-transmitted rabies is included, helping the countries to incorporate it and to adjust it to requirements and recommendations received by them, using its results in order to identify areas that require specific strategies of action and greater attention, such as border areas and municipalities in which the viral circulation persists.
- Technological advances developed in the Region are taken into account, particularly diagnosis methods and modern vaccine development.
- Strategies are developed in order to make effective the action at the local level, taking into account decentralization of health services, developing an agenda for agreement among the three levels of government, national, provincial and municipal, and establishing formal commitments that include these levels in the achievement of the scheduled goals.
- A motto is sought to synthesize the spirit of the countries of the Americas regarding the prevention of human cases of rabies.

2. Strengthening of the laboratory services:

- Many countries have strengthened their surveillance systems and have adequate diagnostic laboratory services. There are others in which serious shortcomings have been detected, which prevent a timely alert and help maintain viral circulation in animal species with consequences in human cases of rabies. Those countries should, in the immediate future, install or strengthen their laboratory services and surveillance.

3. Horizontal technical cooperation:

- It is necessary to reaffirm the commitment to strengthen horizontal technical cooperation, given the contrasts seen in the recorded advances in the countries of the Region.

4. Rabies treatments:

- The recommendation is reiterated to reach the commitment of access and availability of effective rabies treatments for all the inhabitants of the region.

5. Intersectional coordination:

- Beyond the specific reach of the different sections of government, the ministers of health and agriculture should lead the cooperative efforts of integration with all the sectors that are involved or could get involved in the prevention of human cases by wildlife rabies and in the control of risk factors.

6. Local action:

- Taking into account decentralization of the health services of the countries, national governments should obtain formal commitments from the local governments for the effective implementation of the expected actions in the Regional Plan.

7. Certification of areas free of canine rabies:

- In order to sustain the results obtained to date, all the areas that have achieved advances in the control of canine rabies (variants 1 and 2) should certify this condition under guidelines to be standardized by PAHO/WHO based on the experience of Mexico.

8. Legal support for dog control in public environments:

- It is recommended that the countries have effective legal support in order to attend to the hazards for the public health due to the existence of dogs in public environments and of the challenge given by the presence and interaction of dogs within the society.