

RABIES

WSAVA's 'rabies summit' discusses management and control in Colombia

THE problem of rabies in Colombia, and possible strategies for its management and control, formed the subject of a one-day 'rabies summit' organised by the World Small Animal Veterinary Association's (WSAVA's) One Health Committee.

Held during the WSAVA's annual world congress in Cartagena, Colombia, in September, the summit brought together members of the veterinary community in Colombia, representatives of the Colombian government and other stakeholders. Luke Gamble, founder of the Mission Rabies project, was a special guest.

While the focus was on canine rabies, those attending the summit heard that wildlife rabies currently poses a greater problem in Colombia, where no cases of dog-mediated human rabies have been reported since 2007. However, some deaths have been reported following infection with bat lyssavirus.

The meeting also heard that, in Colombia, it is compulsory to vaccinate dogs and cats against canine rabies each year, with approximately 50 per cent of animals being vaccinated in private clinics, while others are vaccinated free of charge in government-run



Participants in the rabies summit, held in Colombia during this year's WSAVA world congress

clinics or shelters. However, participants reported that they did not regard the annual vaccination requirement as being enforceable because private veterinary clinics do not report the number of dogs that they vaccinate, and because there is no regulatory oversight to ensure that vaccination is being carried out to the required standard. Colombia also has a problem with free-roaming dogs, sometimes living in large concentrations, in both urban and rural areas and, while some groups try to implement vaccination and neutering programmes, participants reported that those undertaking such programmes were often inadequately trained.

A particular challenge exists in border areas between Colombia and Venezuela, where an indigenous population of around 100,000 people lives. This population has

numerous dogs, but delegates reported that it was highly resistant to outside 'interference' or help. The dogs roam indiscriminately across the national borders.

Potential solutions identified at the summit included the introduction of further education for veterinary students, to ensure that they are fully equipped to help in the fight against rabies, and also for doctors, to ensure that they have the requisite knowledge of rabies, particularly because so few human cases are now being identified in Colombia. Participants also highlighted the importance of viewing public health as a key aspect of veterinary science.

Dr Gamble, who was this year's recipient of the WSAVA's One Health award for his work with Mission Rabies (VR, September 17, 2016, vol 179, p 269), discussed the experience of Mission Rabies in its projects in Africa and Asia. He highlighted the importance of delivering a 'proof of concept' in any rabies control programme to help gain the support of the local community. He also described the app developed by the charity to record data to support postvaccination surveillance.

Summarising the day, Michael Day, chair of the WSAVA's One Health Committee, said that the discussions had been very useful. 'We hear your concerns about knowing how many dogs are vaccinated and invite you to consider whether the adoption of technology, such as that being used by Mission Rabies, could be of assistance,' he said, adding: 'The comments you made about education were particularly interesting and I strongly urge a swift opening of communication between the ministry [of health] and the veterinary and medical educators to ensure that effective training can be provided to student and practising veterinarians and doctors and to the general public.'

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