

THE TEACHING OF VETERINARY EPIDEMIOLOGY IN POLAND. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE PRESENT STATE AND PERSPECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE.

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L'épidémiologie vétérinaire fait partie du programme d'études des 4 Facultés de Médecine Vétérinaire en Pologne. Traditionnellement, il a été appelé épizootologie générale et fait partie de l'enseignement des maladies infectieuses. La grande majorité des enseignants utilise l'ancienne forme pendant les discussions sur l'épidémiologie. Certains utilisent les termes des maladies infectieuses et épizootologie comme homonymes. Les connaissances et la compréhension du terme d'épidémiologie vétérinaire parmi les scientifiques vétérinaires sont très ambiguës. C'est pourquoi l'épidémiologie vétérinaire polonaise par rapport à celle de médecine humaine est très arriérée. Mais les démarches sont faites par les représentants académiques et du gouvernement pour discuter les alternatives possibles pour régler ce problème en matière d'éducation dans le pays qui connaît un processus important de transformation de l'état centralisé à celui du marché libre.

Veterinary epidemiology has been so closely associated with infectious diseases in Poland in the past that in Polish veterinary literature the terms are used interchangeably by many. Traditionally, 'veterinary epidemiology' has been called 'general epizootiology' and is taught as part of the infectious diseases course of the undergraduate curriculum at all four faculties of veterinary medicine in Poland. The vast majority of academics continue to use the former term in discussions about epidemiology. Some use the terms infectious diseases and 'specific' epizootiology interchangeably. Until recently very little analytical epidemiological techniques have been used in works reported in the Polish veterinary literature. Some of the descriptive veterinary epidemiology work carried out on infectious diseases has been quite impressive. Thanks to it the past history of the control of diseases of national importance in Poland has been acceptable. The country is now free of all list A diseases, either never having had the disease or thanks to successful eradication schemes. Poland is also considered by O.I.E. guidelines to be free of many of the list B diseases, incl. bovine tuberculosis, brucellosis and others. Under communist rule when decisions were made centrally labor and laboratory intensive disease control schemes were carried out as major priorities regardless of the cost. During the present transition stage from a centrally controlled economy to a free market system priorities still exist but the organization of veterinary services has changed and along with this new options for more efficiently financing such operations had to be sought. The Directorate of the National Veterinary Services is aptly handling the current transition. However, membership in the European Union would have Poland becoming its eastern frontier state. Although import into the EU is possible by any member state it would seem that frontier states must deal with more intense permanent contact with the outside world. Directed toward that means new legislation on the control of infectious diseases and the organization of the state veterinary services has been enacted recently and will be in force by the end of the year.

Animal production and economics and health management have until recently been fairly uncommon concepts in veterinary medicine. Though large state farms did exist it was viewed as normal to employ specialists in animal husbandry, agricultural economics, plant production in addition to a veterinary surgeon, all full-time, at farms which sometimes had only 100-200 animals. Presently there are few veterinarians prepared to service and advise the remaining non-bankrupted farms and the small family farms that are slowly trying to increase animal numbers.

The perception and understanding of veterinary epidemiology amongst veterinary research workers is very mixed. In this respect Polish veterinary epidemiology and its teaching are far behind our medical academy counterparts. Logically then education in the understanding and use of modern epidemiological techniques and tools is necessary.

An attempt is made to present some of the views of academic and government personell and discuss possible alternatives to solving problems in the education program of a country in the midst of an important transformation process from a centrally controlled state to a free market system.

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