

◆ *Veterinary Medicine and the Alleviation of Global Poverty*

Moderator:

Linda Toth
Southern Illinois University
School of Medicine
Springfield, Illinois

Speakers:

Terry Wollen
Heifer International
Little Rock, Arkansas

Robert F Kahrs
Association of American Veterinary
Medical Colleges
Saint Augustine, Florida

E Paul J Gibbs
University of Florida
Gainesville, Florida

Reporter:

Jamie De Gregory
Blackbaud
Charleston, South Carolina

A trio of speakers offered a comprehensive view of how veterinary medicine interacts with global poverty.

Terry Wollen discussed how Heifer International helps to relieve poverty and hunger in the developing world and the developed world. Started 60 years ago to restock post-World War II Europe, Heifer International today works to end poverty and hunger by supplying livestock and training to communities. Heifer International works in 50 countries, including the United States. Community groups consisting of several families (at least 10 families per group) come together to select the type of animal each family will raise, learn basic care, and share in benefits. When the selected animal gives birth, the first female offspring is passed on to another community member—Passing on the Gift.

Wollen emphasized that providing vet-

erinary care for the livestock is one of the most important elements of success. Many developing countries lack a well-established veterinary infrastructure, and it is difficult to get medical attention in rural areas. Lack of veterinary care can leave animals susceptible. Heifer International trains local people as community animal health workers (CAHWs) to provide grassroots veterinary care. CAHW candidates are nominated by their villages to become trained in basic first aid and husbandry. They can then care for the local livestock population and spread the knowledge they gain.

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Overall, Heifer International strives to help villages and communities to become self-sufficient and economically stable. Wollen said that one example of success can be seen when a family can feed itself and earn enough money to buy shoes for the children to walk to school.

Furthering the discussion of the importance of veterinary education was Robert F Kahrs, who explained how the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges' Global Initiatives in Veterinary Education (GIVE) program seeks to close the gaps in veterinary care of which Wollen spoke. GIVE works with veterinary schools in the United States and Canada to pair resources with programs in the developing world.

The exchange program benefits the North American institution by providing

a global perspective and experience with exotic diseases, and the companion school is able to bolster its resources through curricular materials, journal subscriptions, distance learning, and faculty/student exchanges. The goal is the companion school's ability to strengthen its programs and build a more robust veterinary infrastructure in its home country.

Finally, E Paul J Gibbs, of the University of Florida, moved the discussion out of the classroom again, highlighting another way in which human life and animal life intersect—in zoonotic diseases, diseases transmitted from animals to humans. The pressures of poverty and hunger in the developing world could be leading to increased exposure to zoonotic diseases. Hunger and poverty can often put people into contact with animals that could be carrying diseases such as Ebola hemorrhagic fever.

With the growth of world commerce and travel, no spot in the world is more than 24 hours away from any other, and this creates the potential to spread disease quickly over large parts of the planet. That makes it even more important to stop the spread of zoonotic diseases where they start—mostly in the villages of developing countries. Vaccinations are critical for preventing disease. The vaccination effort to eliminate rinderpest (a lethal disease) in cattle throughout the world is a good example.

Possible transmission of zoonotic diseases, such as avian influenza, is a looming problem. Current instances of avian influenza in humans are few, but changes in the virus caused by its travel around the world and its interaction with other species, most notably pigs, could cause it to infect humans more readily. Gibbs noted that although efforts to contain the virus are going well, the potential consequences could be devastating. 🦠