

One Health - At the Crossroads - By Ted Cohn, DVM - Reprinted from One Health Newsletter, Winter issue, January 2010 – Posted One Health Initiative website Thursday, January 21, 2010

## **\*\* One Health - At the Crossroads**

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**The views expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the AVMA and/or the AVMA Executive Board.**

I first became aware of the concept of One Health during my first year as a veterinary student at the then, Tuskegee Institute. I was attending a class on the history of veterinary medicine and our instructor asked the class what the term "One Medicine" meant. He went on to describe, what is today the accepted definition of the principles of One Health, "*One Health is the collaborative effort of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally, to address critical challenges and attain optimal health for people, domestic animals, wildlife, and our environment*".

Since that first introduction, I have believed that every practicing veterinarian could and should play an important role in supporting this concept. Practitioners must be cognizant that they are responsible to help to protect the health of not only our patients, but their owners as well. As a small animal and exotics practitioner, I feel my exam room sits at the cross roads between animal and human health. I constantly remind myself that the cute new puppy in my exam room, may be a vector for *Toxocara*; the urban chicken flock I visit could harbor avian influenza; the pampered cat that "never goes outside, except when he escapes", toxoplasmosis; and the pot-bellied pig, H1N1 influenza. It is my duty to not only diagnose and treat my animal patients, but also to inform their owners of the potential threat of zoonotic disease, their pets represent. Further, if I diagnose a reportable disease, then I have the

responsibility to inform my state veterinarian and/or public health authorities, so that appropriate follow up actions can be carried out.

Our patients and their owner's often share similar health concerns. Daily, we see pets and pet owners that are a part of the obesity epidemic affecting such a large percent of our population. We directly address the pet's weight problem but through our communications efforts, we can also influence the pet owner to take action regarding their own disease. A public health physician owns one of my favorite patients, we have often lamented that the veterinary profession has not been more active in the fight to get people to stop smoking. If veterinarians would emphasize the negative effect that second hand smoke can have on their pets, we may help persuade people to stop smoking, an obvious health benefit for themselves as well as their animal.

Why have I shared these experiences? Well, not only do I see my exam room as a One Health cross roads, but also I believe the concept of One Health itself is at a critical junction. For this most worthy of efforts to succeed, it will take broad based, long-term support. It will require high-levels of co-ordination, co-operation and commitment, by both the veterinary and the human medical professions. It is imperative that we as a profession (especially at the level of organized veterinary medicine) communicate zealously with our human health care counterparts (i.e. physicians) to let them know the cooperative roles we can each play. A successful amalgamation of efforts as envisioned by One Health will enhance the quality of care for all of our patients. For the sake of our animal patients, as well as the global human population it is essential that this initiative succeed.

**\*\* This article by Dr. Cohn has also been published in the Winter issue of the One Health Newsletter January 2010 and is reprinted therefrom.**

[http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/medicine/One\\_Health/OHNLWinter2010.pdf](http://www.doh.state.fl.us/Environment/medicine/One_Health/OHNLWinter2010.pdf)



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