

One Welfare: It's the Circle of Life, Simba!

In recent months the IVMA Animal Welfare Committee has moved to integrate new discoveries in physiology, environmental science and the epidemiology of diseases into a framework that will advance our profession's status as the premier source of knowledge on animal care and the implication of both companion and production animal activities on health in general. In this context, we look to advance the concept of "One Welfare" that acknowledges the reality that health and well-being are the desired outcome of numerous environmental factors¹. Reduction of such complex interactions to a single issue, e.g. animal vs. human disease, is an artificial and doomed strategy when addressing today's global-scale problems. One only need consider the resources that are being expended to monitor, track and mitigate various forms of influenza...a development that has re-introduced the term zoonosis to the public mind.

We see One Welfare as an extension of the already vigorous One Health Initiative that our national AVMA has championed. One Welfare, in this context, extends the idea of stewardship as a strategy to meet the goals of One Health. Stewardship is taken to mean the methods, materials and processes we apply to reduce suffering and to promote the physical and mental well-being of animals in our charge. It applies equally to companion animal species as well as to our vital food animal production sector. We believe it evident that the healthy puppy brings satisfaction to the owner and that well-housed and nourished cattle contribute to the better interests of a producer. The "welfare" of all is increased.

Arguably, two trends have contributed to the evolution of the concept of One Welfare. The first event is the increasing specialization brought on by the astounding scientific and technological advances in clinical disciplines. While that allows for the intense focus on the single problem once diagnosed, it also can fragment the ability to synthesize a larger understanding of a problem. For example, treating cancer in an individual is not the same as understanding why cancer develops in the general population. Fortunately, this tendency to fragment knowledge has been recognized and the past two decades have witnessed a dramatic increase in the participation of multidisciplinary teams when addressing scientific problems. This trend has been championed by many, including Nobel Laureate E. O. Wilson who calls for "Consilience" or the "jumping together of knowledge by linking of facts and fact-based-theory across disciplines to create a common groundwork of explanation".²

Increasing urbanization is the second event that has contributed to the estrangement of the public mind with our role as a species in the natural scheme. Most people today have no concept of how food is produced and yet that roast beef they purchase, and the price they pay for it, materially contributes to their welfare. Similarly, fragmentation of families by distance or circumstance and the aging population increase the value of animals that may be the only consistent source of companionship for many individuals. Adding to this mix is the well-documented degradation of the general public understanding of basic scientific principals and methods. Emotional appeals sway media debates away from fact-based

¹ Colonius TJ and Earley RW. (2013) One welfare: a call to develop a broader framework of thought and action. JAVMA, Vol 242 No. 3

² Wilson EO. (1998) Consilience: the Unity of Knowledge. Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. New York.

discussion to agenda-driven reaction. One need only look to the “heat” developed by presentations of Global Warming to confirm this point.

While the IVMA Animal Welfare Committee certainly isn’t proposing a solution to all problems, we do feel there are steps we can, and should, take as a science-based organization to increase our ability as a profession to achieve the principals of One Welfare as listed in the IVMA PRINCIPALS OF ANIMAL WELFARE. We will look for opportunities to provide continuing education to IVMA members on One Welfare related topics. We seek expanded opportunities to work with food animal producer organizations and shelter/aid organizations. Most importantly, we hope to expand discussion among our professional membership on this concept and to recognize outstanding effort in welfare through awards. The objective is to ensure that whether you are an individual clinic owner, a food animal practitioner, an academician or engaged in public health and regulatory medicine, we all have the tools at hand to be a trusted voice in public debates. We certainly can have an impact at many levels to carry the message that we all are, indeed, part of that “Circle of Life”!