

Commentary

World Rabies Day (September 28, 2010): the continuing effort to 'make rabies history'

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In spite of a number of advances in rabies research and education, rabies remains a serious global threat and causes 55,000 deaths annually. About half of these deaths occur in children under 15 years of age, and in areas where awareness, public and private support, and rabies vaccines and immunoglobulin (RIG) are unavailable or too expensive. Until rabies biologics become more readily available, public and professional education remain of critical importance toward efforts to eliminate this dreadful scourge.

In North America, bats remain the principal cause of rabies deaths although the epizootic in wildlife remains a serious challenge. In much of the developing world, dogs are the principal transmitter of rabies to humans. More than half the rabies deaths globally occur in Asia, where adequate preventive care is often unavailable. In addition, the ongoing rabies outbreak in Bali reminds us of the dire consequences of ill-informed and ineffective animal culling without adequate vaccination of at least 70% of all dogs to control spread of rabies.

This year marks the fourth World Rabies Day (WRD) effort under the sponsorship of the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC)/Alliance for

Rabies Control (ARC), WHO, The U.S. CDC, FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization), OIE (World Organization for Animal Health), a number of veterinary organizations and schools, and several national ministries of agriculture, animal health, and public health. The number of countries participating in WRD efforts has grown from 75 in 2007 to 105 in 2009, and in Asia from 13 in 2007 to 24 in 2009. Currently, the Alliance (GARC/ARC) is communicating prevention messages to 200 countries and territories through partnerships with a variety of private and public organizations.

In its first three years, WRD efforts have resulted in educating nearly 100 million people, providing almost three million animal vaccinations, and in 2009, receiving over 205,000 visitors to its web site (www.worldrabiesday.org). Much of this work has been done by dedicated volunteers, as well as through donations from individuals and various foundations.

However, much more work remains. WRD4 is another opportunity to 'Make Rabies History' and 'Save the Children'. The authors encourage all health and government leaders to observe and support this effort, remembering that rabies is 100% preventable.