Role of Veterinarians in Public Health: Bangladesh and Global Perspectives

Emerging and re-emerging diseases including food borne illnesses are now significant public health concerns. Furthermore, resistance to antimicrobials has also become an issue of increasing concern for animal production and human health. Humans, animals and their pathogens have coexisted for millennia, but recent economic and environmental trends as well as structural change in the livestock sector, geographic clustering of intensive livestock production facilities near urban areas and the movement of animals, people and pathogens between intensive and traditional production systems are creating new disease risks intensifying old ones. According to the United Nation’s World Health Organization (WHO), about 75 percent of the new diseases that have affected humans in the past 10 years are caused by pathogens of animal origin. This has resulted in a global increased awareness of the close interdependence between animal health and human health.

The veterinary professionals contribute to improvement of human health by advancing biomedical and comparative medical research, preventing and addressing zoonotic diseases and enhancing environmental and ecosystem health as well. Veterinarians, because of their knowledge on animal diseases and food production have become leaders in developing and implementing new methods of promoting sustainable public health. Due to the ability to link the health of the animal and human populations, Veterinarians are in an ideal position to address the concerns of public health. The involvement of veterinary expertise at the policy level is necessary to ensure adequate planning, design, implementation and supervision of veterinary public health programs and to ensure appropriate integration and collaboration with human health programs. Throughout the world Veterinarians have been employed as policy makers and directors of public health programs in government departments and public health institutes including international agencies such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE).

In Bangladesh, Institute of Public Health (IPH), National Institute of Preventive and Social Medicine (NIPSOM) are the national level public health institutes supporting in the different health policy formulation of the government and community health programs through research, training and services. On the other hand, Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research (IEDCR) is the nation’s focal point for conducting disease surveillance, outbreak investigation, research in the public health issue and training as well. Repeatedly, Bangladesh was stroke with some emerging diseases of animal origin like avian influenza, Anthrax and Nipah. IEDCR investigated all the outbreak cases in collaboration with Department of Livestock Services and International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B). But, its really disappointing that there is no Veterinarian working in the leading public health institutes in Bangladesh except few in ICDDR,B. Though, we have several veterinary institutions right now in Bangladesh, limited research is undertaken relating to epidemiology of infectious diseases as well as public health issues. Unfortunately, in the institutional level, there is negligence of adopting research that would provide a new insight into the epidemiology. As a result, veterinary graduates are coming out with relatively poor basics regarding public health issues.

As specialized Veterinarians are very few in the field of public health, they may come forward so that they could take the lead in the public health sector. Therefore, it is highly recommended that more research should be adopted related to public health as well as epidemiology of zoonotic diseases so that upcoming Veterinarians might take the challenges of public health concern. Besides, we strongly urge the government to recognize fully the necessity of direct veterinary contribution to public health policy development. In addition, more Veterinarians should be employed in the public health institute so that these institutes work independently by addressing the concerns outlined above.

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