Preface

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Guest Editor

As a veterinarian working in public health settings for much of my career, I have often found it challenging to explain what I do for a living to friends and family members, who are mystified as to why it does not involve providing direct medical care to dogs and cats. Events like the bioterrorist attacks of October 2001, during which purified *Bacillus anthracis* spores reached their victims through the U.S. mail, have obviated the need for further explanation. The popular media has brought the drama of public health into the living rooms of every one of us, such that we all now recognize its importance.

In terms of health, we are increasingly becoming “one world,” with a level of interconnectedness to our global neighbors that effectively puts us only a plane ride or cargo shipment away from one another. The level of international trade in goods and animals has made it easier for each of us to be impacted directly by events and circumstances that originate on the other side of the world. Diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome, monkeypox, and influenza have traveled the globe to produce human outbreaks. Given trends in pet ownership, habitat change, and global trade, we cannot ignore the reality that the health of humans, animals, and ecosystems are inextricably linked. While the concept of One Health is far from new, circumstances like the threat of bioterrorism and pandemic influenza have served to galvanize an unprecedented level of support from a wide array of health professionals to this movement. To be truly effective, this has to be a grassroots movement with participation by all veterinarians, regardless of whether they practice small animal medicine, conduct biomedical research, or coordinate mass vaccination campaigns at the international level.

This issue is not intended to be an exhaustive account of every major public health issue. Rather, the first article starts by providing a brief overview of the field and how veterinarians in clinical practice play a vital role in public health. The next two articles provide a description of the structure and function of disease detection and surveillance, which is the backbone of public health that provides the data on which sound public health practices are based. The next three articles focus on selected emerging disease topics: influenza, tick-borne diseases, and antibiotic resistance. These are followed by two articles that delve into the human-animal bond, its impact on human health, and how veterinarians play an essential role in addressing some of the animal
problems that have an impact on public health, such as animal bites and destructive behaviors. The article on emergency management for disasters provides an overview of existing infrastructure and describes how veterinarians can lend their expertise to this essential function. The article on border health provides the basis for understanding the impact international animal trafficking has on public health. The final article provides a case study of how San Diego County, California has capitalized on interdisciplinary collaboration to further the goals of public health and better serve all members of their community.

The major point I want the reader to take away from this issue is that no profession or government agency can effectively address all of a community’s public health concerns alone. While veterinarians have long played a role in public health, the days of public health as a small subspecialty of veterinary medicine are over. The public health needs of our local communities, nation, and the world are too great; every veterinarian must play a public health role, whether it is their predominant job description or it is intermingled with their daily activities in a clinical setting. If anything, it is my hope that the readers of this issue will recognize the importance of their roles in this dynamic and be motivated to expand on that role by connecting with their local public health agencies and health care professionals outside of veterinary medicine. Methods could be simply to make an introduction, get involved in disaster planning or response efforts, deliver educational materials, or establish a mutually beneficial partnership to share diagnostic or laboratory expertise and resources. In doing so, veterinarians also play an educational role by increasing the community’s awareness of our unique expertise in areas like comparative medicine and population health. With continued outreach and community involvement, the full potential of veterinary contributions to public health can be realized.

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