

From the Wings: The AVIS College Bulletin January 2007

Happy New Year, 2007

In wishing you all a very happy and prosperous New Year 2007, I would also like to welcome all AVIS subscribers, site visitors and contributors to our work to this first edition of **From the Wings**. **From the Wings** is a new monthly bulletin from AVIS College, the on-line AVIS community.

The Times They Are A'changin'

The management guru Peter Drucker wrote recently: "The question that faces the strategic decision maker is not what an organisation should do tomorrow. It is rather what an organisation must do today to be ready for an uncertain tomorrow." State veterinary services are in the thick of this uncertainty.

As a result, and in response to suggestions from members of the AVIS community, I have invited a number of contributors to write editions of this Bulletin to tackle the challenges of change. Colleagues from the veterinary public health, public health, food safety, regulatory affairs, policy formation and communications will all contribute brief articles to **From the Wings** about ways of understanding and dealing with change and uncertainty. These will be published throughout 2007, on or around the 21st of each month.

Some articles will be thought-provoking; others informative, answering questions of common interest; yet others will indicate and analyse likely trends and challenges and ways of responding to them.

Over time these writings will, I hope, build up into a useful, practical resource for coping with change, whether as an aid to the execution of professional duties, for

training and education or for dealing with the public.

Change Afoot

As a non-veterinarian I have been delighted to be part of the AVIS project since 1995. I have watched it grow, evolve and respond to change, especially in the role and nature of state veterinary services. There have been momentous changes at almost every level - personnel, mission and tools of trade. So for this first Bulletin, I started to speculate on where three particular changes might be taking us.

A Rising Generation of Women

To the outside observer, the most obvious personnel change is in gender balance. Women are more and more taking their place in leadership roles. I have had great pleasure in my career working for and being mentored by men; but I am proud to see more women rising to the top. At one point in recent times I believe that the Chief Veterinary Officers of England, France and Germany were all women. This is perhaps the first time that the veterinary services of three major linked European economies were led in this way.

In time, I imagine this kind of change in leadership will no longer attract attention. But I wonder if women look at the task of leading a state veterinary service any differently from men, and, if so, what impact this may have. Perhaps my women readers would like to comment, or even contribute an article?

Mission

The mission of state veterinary services is changing as well. The emphasis I recall when I first joined AVIS was on "OIE List A" disease prevention and management. It



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perhaps made the profession seem rather inward-looking. Now public health and safety, animal safety and welfare, and the globalisation of international trade are very much in the forefront. State veterinary services are also tasked in many countries with key roles in food safety and traceability.

My AVIS College colleagues responded to these changes by focusing attention on what they called “high impact diseases”, such as foot and mouth or avian influenza. These diseases can impact society as a whole, and damage to animals and animal production can even be outweighed by damage to other sectors, such as travel and tourism. This has meant that the profession has to look more and more outwards. Communication with the media, and with key stakeholders, such as the consumer and the decision-maker, is now fundamental to the job. I would like to hear from members of the AVIS community how we at AVIS College may better support their growing public communication functions.

A Communications Revolution

The field from which I come is communications. I am reassured in recent years to see that my expertise can be more helpful to AVIS than I first appreciated. I see great opportunities to use the new technologies, especially broadband internet and “3G” phones and portable email devices, to work more closely with each other, while keeping others informed at little additional effort or expense.

Communications technology is changing at least as fast as the content it carries. A combination of broadband internet and smart mobile phones are revolutionising the way we communicate with each other, all over the world. We really are living in a

global village. It is hard to imagine any profession benefiting more from these new possibilities than global veterinary public health, especially in emergencies, when expertise is scarce and everything is “urgent”. I sense we have a way to go before we can see these benefits realised, but good planning and practical preparation helps.

The communications revolution has had a profound effect on AVIS itself. We used to send out most of our AVIS programs on diskette, and then on CD; now the trend is to use the internet. Not only are the costs of access falling all the time, but with increased speed and bandwidth what we can do extends and improves almost daily. The internet enables AVIS to pursue a policy of “continuous publication”. Programs and services are under standing review and updates and enhancements are added all the time. And we are responding to requests from many of you to integrate knowledge, data and training under a single roof – the AVIS portal.

Moving up the Agenda

One thing is clear, veterinary public health, and all that goes with it, has moved up the policy agenda. In most parts of the world animal health and welfare is a matter of regular and increasingly well-informed public debate. It would be good to shape and influence that debate, as well as respond to it.

May I again wish you all a very happy and successful 2007. I warmly invite you to let me have your comments on **From the Wings**. Send me your ideas for topics you would like to see handled in this kind of article – including your own writing if you wish to submit a piece for consideration. I hope to hear from you.

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