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FMD Training: The “Blended” Approach

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I recently had the pleasure of leading an intensive training workshop for state and provincial veterinary services in Iran. The workshop was organised by The National FMD Task Force in the framework of an ongoing surveillance project on FMD (Central Asia Foot and Mouth Disease Surveillance Project FAO - MTF/INT/003/EEC). The event was held in Tehran and in Hamedan province, May 9 – 15, 2007, and was attended by representatives of the Iran Veterinarian Organisation from a total of thirty provinces.

The objective was to train participants in “Foot-and-Mouth Disease outbreak investigation and follow up”. When I was part of the TAIEX workshop, September 14, 2006, on “AVIS and other Taiex website accessible databases” it was clear to me from the feedback I got from the twenty or more European countries attending that a combination of face-to-face and web-based training and support for state veterinary services – the so called “blended” approach – was now a realistic option for the future in Europe. The blended strategy also offered the prospect of meeting one of the requests made by many SVS participants during the TAIEX workshop, to enhance continuity of professional support between face to face events or consulting visits. So I was interested to test whether such an idea could also work in countries such as Iran.



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So, in agreement with AVIS, we set up online access for the participants, ready for the course.

The workshop design included theoretical and practical components. In the theoretical part, basic knowledge and understanding of FMD as a high-impact animal disease were refreshed. The principles of outbreak investigation were reviewed and a model of best practice was presented and discussed. In the practical part, groups, each of five participants, were sent out for two days to investigate FMD outbreaks in the field.

By the end of the workshop all the participants had been able to observe FMD clinical cases, to perform an outbreak investigation in field conditions and draw on the resources provided by the tutors and online. All participants successfully passed the final knowledge evaluation. Participant feedback during and after the course demonstrated that everyone found the AVIS programme very useful to check and strengthen their FMD knowledge and awareness, to the extent that a number of requests were voiced to translate and adapt parts of the programme to suit local conditions.

AVIS programmes were available on demand throughout the workshop. More specifically, the FMD modules were used by all the participants, both before and after the field activity. Given the increasing quality and accessibility of internet technology it was also clear that direct use in the field would be a realistic option as well via a handheld device. As a validation of the blended approach to training, it left me in no doubt that this is the way forward. It was also clear that Iranian participants shared the positive view of their European colleagues as to the benefit continuity of support through an online resource such as AVIS could bring.

From my field observation, I would also like to see increased attention on field use as well. For the veterinarian or livestock owner inexperienced in early detection of diseases such as FMD the opportunity exists through the appropriate use of such devices to greatly enhance the speed and accuracy of the early warning system, which we all know is key to preventing or minimising the damage done by outbreaks.

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Note on the Author

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