Delaware Partnership for One Health
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The Partnership

What is One Health? One Health is a collaborative, multisectoral, and trans-disciplinary approach – working at local, regional, national, and global levels – to achieve optimal health and well-being outcomes recognizing the interconnectedness between people, animals, plants and their shared environment.

Why is this important in Delaware? Planetary environmental health may affect human and animal health through contamination, pollution and changing climate conditions that may lead to increases in both non-infectious diseases (e.g. food deprivation) and infectious disease (e.g. COVID-19). Worldwide, nearly 75 percent of all emerging human infectious diseases in the past three decades originated in animals. As we push into the wild and the habitats of animals, these chance events will increase. We must remember that the global population in 2011 was 7 billion, and is expected to be 11 billion by 2050. In order to provide adequate healthcare, food and water for the growing global population, the health professions, and related disciplines and institutions, must work together.

Remember, human-animal interactions/bonds can beneficially impact the health of both people and animals (see Figure 1). This is One Health, One World, One Medicine and quite possibly our Last Chance.

Figure 1. Emotional support animals can bring joy and happiness to patients in long-term care facilities (source: unknown, licensed under CC BY-NC-ND).

A New Beginning Coupled With an Awakening to the Truth

Initially conceived during the 2014 Ebola Outbreak in Africa, and formalized during the Avian Influenza outbreak and increases in Zika Virus cases, the One Health Partnership takes time to look at the issues in a new way. Instead of a decision based on a single siloed profession, we seek the input from multiple professionals in order to avoid unintended outcomes from a lack of a complete picture and understanding of potential bad outcomes to overall health.

While there is no formal process for the development of a One Health movement, task force, coalition or partnership, the end results are very similar: the preservation of life and the
mitigation of harm. Over the last few years, Delaware has spearheaded a coalition with our neighboring states in order to better share vital information and best practices. This is the first step in breaking down the walls that separate us, and learning what issues there are outside our own borders. We need to be able to better understand one another, and to use shared information as a tool to better inform the people and the leaders so that appropriate actions can be taken to secure a more fruitful tomorrow.

Today, as we press on with our “new normal” lives, we are living in and around a One Health issue: COVID-19, a novel Coronavirus suspected to have originated in wildlife due to a chance encounter from a human being. This encounter led to the establishment of a new human pathogen and, unfortunately, the start of a pandemic. This should not have come as a surprise, as we have been preparing for such an event for many years. What did come as a surprise was just how elegant the enemy - SARS-CoV-2 – is, and how readily it is able to mutate and adapt.

**How Can the One Health Model Work Now?**

Fortunately, the One Health model is working right now. Medical fields have shared information, therapies and best practices. Animals are being monitored for potential infection, disease and establishment of reservoirs. Both active and passive monitoring is now happening in many areas of the United States and across the globe, and this information is being shared with global partners.

**Final Thoughts**

At one time, I advocated One Health as a New Beginning, here and throughout Asia. Now it is time for an Awakening. We can revert to the old normal (siloed discussions, unshared information, and a selfish demeanor) or we can shed the old ways and emerge from the COVID-19 Pandemic anew. Humanity will determine its path, and hopefully there will be an awakening where we are more apt to come alongside our neighbors and provide a hand up, and not a handout, or a gesture that is less than genuine. COVID should be a lesson that we can be defeated. As depicted in Orson Welles War of the Worlds, the aliens are killed by earthly pathogens, “slain after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in His wisdom, has put on the earth.”