

Rabies Free Pakistan - Eliminating Rabies Through One Health Approach

Authors : Anzal Abbas Jaffari, Wajiha Javed, Naseem Salahuddin

Abstract : Rationale: Rabies, a vaccine preventable disease, continues to be a critical public health issue as it kills around 2000-5000 people annually in Pakistan. Along with the disease spread among animals, the dog population remains a victim of brutal culling practices by the local authorities, which adversely affects ecosystem (sinking of poison in the soil - affecting vegetation & contaminating water) and the disease spread. The dog population has been exponentially rising primarily because a lack of a consolidated nationwide Animal Birth Control program and awareness among the local communities in general and children in particular. This is reflected in Pakistan's low SARE score - 1.5, which makes the country trails behind other developing countries like Bangladesh (2.5) and Philippines (3.5). According to an estimate, the province of Sindh alone is home to almost 2.5 million dogs. The clustering of dogs in Peri-Urban areas and inner cities localities leads to an increase of reported dog bite cases in these areas specifically. Objective: Rabies Free Pakistan (RFP), which is a joint venture of Getz Pharma Private Limited and Indus Hospital & Health Network (IHHN); it was established in 2018 to eliminate Rabies from Pakistan by 2030 using the One Health Approach. Methodology: The RFP team is actively working on advocacy and policy front with both the Federal & Provincial government to ensure that all stakeholders currently involved in dog culling in Pakistan have a paradigm shift towards humane methods of vaccination and ABC. Along with the federal government, RFP aims to declare Rabies as a notifiable disease. Whereas RFP closely works with the provincial government of Sindh to initiate a province wide Rabies Control Program. RFP program follows international standards and WHO approved protocols for this program in Pakistan. RFP team has achieved various milestones in the fight against Rabies after successfully scaling up project operations and has vaccinated more than 30,000 dogs and neutered around 7,000 dogs since 2018. Recommendations: Effective implementation of Rabies program (MDV and ABC) requires a concentrated effort to address a variety of structural and policy challenges. This essentially demands a massive shift in the attitude of individuals towards rabies. The two most significant challenges in implementing a standard policy at the structural level are lack of institutional capacity, shortage of vaccine, and absence of inter-departmental coordination among major stakeholders: federal government, provincial ministry of health, livestock, and local bodies (including local councils). The lack of capacity in health care workers to treat dog bite cases emerges as a critical challenge at the clinical level. Conclusion: Pakistan can learn from the successful international models of Sri Lanka and Mexico as they adopted the One Health Approach to eliminate rabies like RFP. The WHO advised One Health approach provides the policymakers with an interactive and cross-sectoral guide, which involves all the essential elements of the eco system (including animals, humans, and other components).

Keywords : animal birth control, dog population, mass dog vaccination, one health, rabies elimination

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