



Humane Rabies Prevention and Population Control in the Dominican Republic

The first steps to end the unnecessary deaths of humans and dogs

High Volume Sterilization Technique Training Seminar For Dominican Veterinarians and Vet Students in the Dominican Republic September 2010

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Summary

In September, Animal Balance (AB) The Anti Rabies Center of the DR, The Alliance for Rabies Control, Illinois University, The Alliance for the Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACC&D) and Ark Sciences came together to organize a week long training session for Dominican veterinarians and veterinary students in the fast and efficient spaying and the Esterisol injection technique. Approximately 120 people attended the sessions and in that time 73 dogs were sterilized; 31 with Esterisol injections and 52 with the fast spay technique.

The training was funded by the Anti Rabies Center of the DR, The Maltz Family Foundation, The Kimball Family Foundation, Ark Sciences, Bend Veterinary Clinic, University of Illinois Department of Animal Sciences and The Alliance for Rabies Control. Thank you all for recognizing the critical and immediate need for this training and for providing the resources.

We are working together to change policy; to end the utilization of lethal methods to control dog populations and the spread of rabies and instead employ a humane strategy countrywide, using high volume sterilization and rabies vaccination campaigns. What is happening in the DR is revolutionary and could potentially become the model for the nations of the Caribbean and governments around the world.



History

At the beginning of 2010 there was an outbreak of canine rabies in Santo Domingo and Santiago, the DR's two major cities. Two humans have died this year from rabies in the DR. I cannot overstate how serious this disease is; there is no cure, it kills humans and dogs and consequently dogs are killed en mass. The deaths from this disease and from controlling it are preventable. With some foresight and by working with governments and communities, we can save humans and dogs from this terrible disease and its dreadful ramifications.

Rabies is often something we do not think of as an important issue, as we consider it controlled in the US and Europe. However, it kills one person every 10 minutes on our planet. Given how small our world is today and how easy it is to travel the planet, perhaps we should reconsider. If you would like to learn more about rabies, please visit <http://www.rabiescontrol.net>.

As a result of the outbreak in the DR, The Anti Rabies Center of the DR, a division of the Health Department, immediately poisoned the street dogs resulting in an international outcry from the animal welfare organizations. Dogs were dying in the streets and there was no control over who was poisoned. Killing the dogs is not the answer, although it is currently the most widely used method globally. As we all know, the dog populations will reproduce to carrying capacity very quickly. These dogs will be intact and not vaccinated. The dangerous cycle continues.

Animal Balance began to work out a different approach. There was no point us condemning the DR Government; we had to provide them with an alternative. We had to find a way to work with them to create a change in policy. When human or animal lives are at stake, you do not alienate the very people who have the power to make change.

In March, the Anti Rabies Center received a donation of a rabies vaccine from the Brazilian government and started a countrywide vaccination program. However, it is reported that the vaccine was flawed and many dogs died, or were not adequately vaccinated. The Anti Rabies Center was doing what it could.

In April 2010, I spoke at the ACC&D conference in Dallas and met Dr. Bob Weedon of the Alliance for Rabies Control and Vice President for ACC&D. Much of the conference had focused on population and rabies control. I wanted Animal Balance to help change policy in the DR to using humane methods for rabies control, so I asked Dr. Weedon for a donation of 1,000 rabies vaccines, which would be used in our next sterilization campaign. He agreed and also very generously offered to come to the DR with a team to be part of the campaign.

Dr. Weedon and I approached Merial for the vaccine. They kindly agreed to the donation, but then the DR government refused approval for its import, as it was being shipped from France. They referred me to the Anti Rabies Center of the DR. I contacted them, after some time, they agreed to speak with me.

At that first meeting they explained the problem, too many dogs and lack of resources. I explained the mission of Animal Balance. I explained how many animals we sterilize by using a faster spay technique and by using Esterilsol, in conjunction with neuters, allowing us to sterilize so many more animals. In addition, our protocols and procedures are safe for both the patient and staff, plus we are using drugs for our anesthetic cocktail that can be bought in the DR, so the project has a very strong element of sustainability, i.e. the local vets can replicate it, once

trained. Dr. Vilorio, the Director, was impressed at our results and kindly donated the new, Dominican produced vaccine for the campaign.

In June 2010, AB held a rabies vaccination and sterilization program in Cabrera. Dr. Weedon and his team came to Cabrera to perform the Esterilsol injections and rabies vaccinations. The AB team conducted the spays and neuters. It was a huge success, we vaccinated 388 dogs, performed 55 Esterilsol injections, 94 spays and 4 neuters in one week. We found that we could use the rabies vaccine as the carrot on the stick, once the people and their dogs were at the clinic; we talked them into sterilizing their dogs.

Please see my report on this campaign at

[http://www.animalbalance.net/files/Animal Balance June DR Rabies Vaccination and Sterilization Clinic2.pdf](http://www.animalbalance.net/files/Animal%20Balance%20June%20DR%20Rabies%20Vaccination%20and%20Sterilization%20Clinic2.pdf)



After the campaign, Dr. Weedon, Dr. Guevara and myself, met with Dr. Vilorio. He was impressed by the campaign results and very interested in learning more about the fast spay technique and Esterilsol injections. Dr. Vilorio suggested that the next step should be a training session for Dominican veterinarians and vet students in Esterilsol injections, the fast spay technique, protocols, anesthetic cocktails, using locally purchased drugs and how to organize a high volume sterilization/rabies vaccination clinic. After which, the DR vets and students could start their own programs.

The Anti Rabies Center of the DR offered to take the lead in organizing the training. Animal Balance would provide the spay training and the Alliance for Rabies Control and Ark Sciences would provide the Esterilsol training. By the end of the meeting we agreed to work collaboratively to help the DR move away from killing and instead to prevention via sterilization and rabies vaccinations en masse.

The Training

We held the training last week and trained 120 vets and vet students at the two Santo Domingo Veterinary Universities, San Pedro University and The Santiago Rabies Center. All groups were present and we spent the morning introducing each organization and explaining why we are working together to change animal management strategy and rabies prevention. In the afternoons the veterinarians, Dr. Weedon and Dr. Maas, demonstrated the techniques.





As there were so many attendees, we split the group into smaller groups and they rotated throughout the clinic, from prep to Esterilsol injection table, or spay table, to recovery. Each group had time to see each area of the clinic.



They watched the Ark Sciences Esterilsol instructional video, practiced the injection technique, subbing grapes for real testicles and then witnessed Dr. Bob Weedon performing the Esterilsol injections. Everyone had sufficient time to ask questions and discuss the benefits of Esterilsol. Dr. Weedon spent time with each group carefully explaining how important injection technique is to avoid any adverse reactions.



Dr. Vilorio performed his first injection and afterwards continued to inspire the vets and students to use the technique to reduce the populations and prevent the spread of rabies in their community.

Dr. Byron Maas performed the spays. Dr. Vilorio and the vets even timed him, 6 and half minutes! They were astonished at the small incision site, the use of the anesthetic cocktail, pain management, use of the spay hook and speed of the overall operation. At times the table was 4 people deep with vets and students holding video cameras and cell phones recording the operations and injections.



The training session was a tremendous success. Relationships between all the groups were solidified and trust formed. The training had been exceptional and the students and vets left inspired and excited to learn more about these techniques and high volume campaigns.

Next Step

In October 2010, Animal Balance is holding a MASH high volume sterilization and rabies vaccination campaign in Cabrera. The Anti Rabies Center has once again donated the rabies vaccine. I have invited all the vets and vet students to come and see how a MASH campaign works. Given the interest at the training, I believe that at least 20 people will come each day. Dr. Viloría is also sending his staff members. We will put them to work as team members so they can understand and participate in every aspect of the campaign.

Conclusion

Together we can change the entire approach to animal management and rabies control here in the DR. The DR can become the model for other governments who face the same problems. Simply put, killing does not work to control dog populations and the spread of rabies, mass sterilization combined with rabies vaccination does. Together we are providing the tools that the Dominican Republic needs to enable this goal.

A special thank you to the team: Dr. Bob Weedon, Dr. Amy Fisher, Dr. Marcial Guevara, Dr. Byron Maas, Dr. Martin Viloría, Dr. Patricia Valerio and our fabulous interpreter Paola Feliz Garcia. You all did a fabulous job and worked very hard, thank you!

