

“One Medicine” Concept Puts Veterinary Medicine at the Center of Global Health

While she was in Urbana to give the keynote address at the September 7 and 8 Infectious Disease Informatics workshop, Dr. Karen Becker (DVM IL ’87) made time to visit with veterinary students who have an interest in public health careers.

“I don’t have to explain to you the connection between animal health and human health,” she told them, reeling off a long list of high-profile disease threats of animal origin: avian influenza, monkeypox, SARS, and many more.

She didn’t have to explain the connection to the federal government either.

A veterinarian with a master’s in public health degree, Dr. Becker was assigned to her present position as special assistant to the director of the Office of Public Health Emergency Preparedness in 2001, when that unit was created within the Department of Health and Human Services in response to the September 11 terror attacks.

Her work experience has spanned the foot and mouth disease outbreak in the United Kingdom and hurricane-related disease outbreaks in North Carolina. Today her ability to move science into public policy is directed toward enhancing global health security.

Producing more leaders like Dr. Becker is one of the goals of the Illinois Center for One Medicine, a proposed initiative of the College that will be explored at a January colloquium.

The College already partners with the School of Public Health at the University of Illinois at Chicago to offer a joint DVM MPH program. Begun in spring 2005, this program now enrolls 8 students preparing to meet the growing need for experts like Dr. Becker.

The Center for One Medicine would build on that and other partnerships to create a public health program that encompasses a variety of teaching, research, and service activities.

“One medicine” recognizes the interrelationships among human health, domestic and wild animal health, agriculture, and the environment. It also acknowledges the central role veterinarians play in public health issues, especially in detecting, researching, and preventing infectious diseases of animal origin. Veterinarians are the only health professionals trained in multispecies comparative medicine.

Organized by faculty members Jack Herrmann, Yvette Johnson, and Fred Troutt, the January colloquium will involve leaders from a broad array of health, research, and governmental institutions.

Invited will be representatives of state and federal agencies, including the Food and Drug Administration, the Office of Science Technology Policy, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the departments of Agriculture, Public Health, and more; elected

officials at the state and federal level; and faculty from units throughout the University of Illinois, ranging from the School of Public Health in Chicago to the Colleges of Medicine, Law, and Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences in Urbana.

The concept of “one medicine” is already at the heart of the Conservation Medicine Center of Chicago, our partnership with Chicago-area zoological institutions and Loyola University Stritch School of Medicine. Our colleagues from these zoos will also be invited to the colloquium.

The colloquium represents a first step in pursuing a key initiative in the College’s strategic plan. Not only would the proposed Center for One Medicine address pressing societal needs, but it would also fit well with other priorities of our College and campus, including raising our visibility in Chicago.

If participants in the colloquium agree that the Center for One Medicine has the potential for making a meaningful contribution to global health, the College will look to the Illinois veterinary community for assistance in securing legislative support or other means of funding this initiative.

In the meantime, I welcome your thoughts on this and other initiatives of the College. You can review our strategic plans on the Web at www.cvm.uiuc.edu/dean/cvmplan.html, and you can reach me at dean@cvm.uiuc.edu.—
Herb Whiteley