

**LINKAGES BETWEEN THE VETERINARIANS
AND PARA-PROFESSIONALS**

"Countries Testimonies"

**BEING PAPER DELIVERED AT THE OIE AVTA
GALVmed REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE
ROLE OF VETERINARY PARA-
PROFESSIONALS (VPP) IN AFRICA.**

**AT ST. GEORGE HOTEL AND CONFERENCE
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A PAPER PRESENTED BY SIR GODFREY C. OSUJI, “NATIONAL PRESIDENT, NIGERIAN ASSOCIATION OF ANIMAL HEALTH AND HUSBANDRY TECHNOLOGISTS”, AT A REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON THE ROLE OF VETERINARY PARAPROFESSIONALS IN AFRICA, HELD IN PRETORIA ZA BETWEEN 13TH – 15TH SEPTEMBER 2015

PROTOCOL

May I stand on existing protocol.

PREAMBLE:

I wish to appreciate GOD for the journey mercies granted all of us to this conference. I also wish to particularly thank Him for this special gift of good health and the grace to participate in this event.

I feel humbled that a few members of our profession could organize a beautiful forum where paraprofessionals in Africa could meet and inter-phase on how to advance service delivery in Animal Health to the prosperity of our dear continent. This occasion really calls for celebration and for those of us visiting South Africa for the very first time, it will also be an opportunity not only to talk about Animal Health Care delivery; but also participate fully in the cuisine and other social activities of the Zulu Kingdom. Once again, I say thank you to Benson Ameda, Joan and others who are architects of this initiative. It takes just a single match strike to ignite a big flame.

I was a delegate to Brazil during the OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education and the Role of Veterinary Statutory bodies held in Foz de iguaçu from 4th – 6th December, 2013.

One pertinent question that came up during that conference was why OIE has not been organizing conferences for the paraprofessionals, while the veterinarians have had several conferences organized for them.

Today OIE is close to filling this yawning gap to the delight of all of us. We do expect that a world summit will follow subsequently after this. However, I wish to express profound appreciation to OIE and other co-sponsors for coming up and for giving me the honor and privilege to deliver this lecture. I do hope that my modest effort would come near your anticipated deserved expectations.

THE THEME: COUNTRIES TESTIMONIES ON THE ASSOCIATION OF VETERINARY PARAPROFESSIONALS. SUCCINCTLY PUT: HOW HAS THE VETERINARY PARAPROFESSIONALS FAIRED SO FAR IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

To under score this topic, I would like to take an in depth look at the word “**VETERINARY PARA PROFESSIONAL**”. The prefix “veterinary” in this context, has raised a lot of dust especially as it is used to qualify paraprofessionals in many countries and many organizations in the Diaspora.

Unfortunately, amongst the veterinarians, it is despicable to affix VETERINARY to any organization or persons other than graduates of veterinary medicine. For instance; in my country Nigeria, a letter titled “***Omission of the Animal Health and Husbandry technologist Cadre from the Scheme of service dated 3rd October, 2002 and Addressed to the Perm Sec Ministry of Agriculture***” The Director of Veterinary Services Abia State of Nigeria wrote.

“The veterinary council of Nigeria which is the governing council regulating the activities of personnel in the veterinary profession; does not approve the use of the word “VETERINARY” to designate persons other than medical graduates of veterinary medicine. These are veterinary surgeons’ or officers. The department has never had Veterinary Technologists, Veterinary Technicians, Veterinary Assistants, Veterinary Hides and Skin Superintendents or Attendants in its career pathway”. Our ND and HND graduates of the University of Nigeria (my Alma-Ata) Federal Colleges of Animal Health and Production have always been awarded certificates in Animal Health and Production Technology”. This is the general concept of most veterinary councils all over Africa.

For us in Nigeria, the nomenclature Animal Health and Husbandry technologist was an award by an arbitration court, following a dispute over role and nomenclature of the paraprofessionals in 1987. This ruling has never been repealed by any court of competent jurisdiction to date. This is why we are quite indifferent to the prefix “***veterinary***” and as such we don’t use it to designate our members or organizations.

The OIE in its wisdom used the prefix “***Animal Health***” in the formation of its office title: “***World Animal Health Organization***” rather than World Veterinary Organization. This laudable action by OIE obviates further enquiry into the use of veterinary or any other prefix.

WHO THEN IS AN ANIMAL HEALTH TECHNOLOGIST?

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia defines him as a person who assists a veterinarian in the performance of his duties. The job role varies throughout the world and common titles include Veterinary Nurses, Veterinary Technician, Veterinary Assistant and Veterinary Technologists and variants with the prefix “ANIMAL HEALTH”.

The scope of practice varies between countries, with some countries allowing suitably qualified paraprofessionals a scope of autonomous practice including minor surgery while others just restrict them to supplying assistance to the veterinarians.

The Animal Health Technologist (AHT) therefore is a tertiary institution graduate who has trained to be paraprofessional in the field of medicine. This person works with a wide variety of species of animals, including small animals such as dogs and cats and large animals such as horse, cattle and other farm animals. Laboratory animals such as rats, mice, guinea pigs and exotics such as birds, monkeys, snakes and other reptiles; as well as some areas of related human health.

The Animal Health Technologist can be compared and even more to a nurse, paramedic, medical laboratory technologist, anesthesiologist, radiologist and medical receptionist in human medicine. AHTs are trained in all of these areas to enhance patient care and improve human – animal bond.

WHERE DO THEY WORK?

- ✓ Veterinary practices (small animal, food animal, equines).
- ✓ Feed lots / Ranches, Dairy Farm (herd core)
- ✓ Wild life rehabilitation centers
- ✓ Animal shelters
- ✓ Zoos
- ✓ Government veterinary clinics
- ✓ Veterinary pharmaceutical sales
- ✓ Pet food sales

- ✓ Teaching
- ✓ Politics (President Jawara of Gambia) etc

Having enumerated the origin and roles of AHT and who he is, it is pertinent to know what qualifies him for this arduous task. History, Training and Skill acquisition is properly captured in the lecture to be delivered by my colleague Rev. German Jacob, which comes up subsequently.

WHAT ARE THEIR LINKAGES WITH THE VETERINARIANS?

It is quite obvious that, if improving the delivery of Animal Health Services must take the front-burner then strengthening the relationship between the veterinarians and the paraprofessionals deserves top priority. The question now is “what actually needs to be done?”

I feel the first shift required is attitudinal. We must first of all as a people, make up our minds that these things need to be done and must be done. For attitudinal shift to be effective however, it must be driven by leadership. It is such attitudinal shift that will compel us to make policies and plans that will ensure that on both production and health fronts, **WE DO NOT “EAT” TODAY AND “STARVE” TOMORROW.** Such a shift will impact upon issues such as legislation, training and defined enforcement of roles. In many of these matters, lack of right attitude towards professionalism has led us into unsustainable directions in time past and we must retrace our steps quickly. Even though we are not exactly an industry without laws, the fact on ground is that standards are neither spelt out nor enforced in most practices. The issue of “winner takes all” becomes the order of the day. The dividing line between professionalism in the industry are blurring by day.

The relationship between colleagues of the industry does not seem to favour professionalism. Across board, **professism** has taken a centre stage. Meanwhile acrimony, and rivalry rather than **esprit de corps** and professional collaboration is the other of the day. There is no doubt that in a bid to liberalize farming and other value chain activities, we have undermined critical aspects of professionalism with dire consequences. In formulating polices, peculiarities should be considered, wide consultations should be made, and people, especially in a professional

set up like ours, should be well guided and wooed through superior ideas rather than threats, intrigues, acrimony and rancor.

This way, harmony and the will to contribute will be encouraged. When professionals are not given roles especially those backed by legislation; there is a tendency for massive exodus, disenchantment and confrontation. Over years, we have lost a large number of our colleagues most of who have veered into other menial or even unrelated professions. Some have turned into pastors and sent to hell our profession due to lack of role and authority to practice.

The greatest challenge faced by the AHT in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa is legislation and lack of defined roles. This legal instrument which will enshrine professionalism and enable professional actors at all levels to practice without any encumbrances has been elusive.

Professor C. A. O Adeyefa, Director Veterinary Teaching Hospital University of Ibadan Nigeria in one of his keynote address, during the opening ceremony of our Conference titled, “Optimizing the Potentials of AHT”, held at the Federal College of Animal Health and Production Technology Ibadan, called for a regulatory council for the AHT, just like the nurses in human medicine. The enormous roles they play in Animal Health activities ranging from treatment, vaccination, extension services epidemiology, disease and minor surgery cannot be overemphasized.

In that regard, the National body of the Association of Animal Health Technologists has gone a long way in presenting a bill for the establishment of a regulatory registration council for the Animal Health and Husbandry Technologists (AHT) in Nigeria.

Although there has been dissenting voices, contentions and resentments from a few misguided groups and individuals, this bill will definitely help progress Animal Health and Veterinary practice and in collaboration with the veterinarians will help check quackery, and unethical sharp practices.

The institution of this board will not in any way undermine or hinder the smooth running or the establishment and effective operation of our VSB. It will rather make it a family affair where everyone will call it “Our Own”. No fears of subversion or subjugation. It is also not meant to create a

parallel authority but to package the paraprofessionals into performing relevant functions such as keeping a register of their members and setting standards for the profession by establishing a “code of conduct” against which the behaviour, competence and practice of its members can be measured and dealt with. This registration board will thus prepare the paraprofessionals for a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) in the establishment or integration into a VSB as a complementary entity. Countries like Canada, UK and Australia have similar associations or council, while also operating an effective VSB.

An out gone president of the Veterinary Council of Nigeria once organized a forum I called “**Talking Point**”, where regular meetings were held between representatives of the Veterinary Council of Nigeria (VCN) and the Nigeria Association of Animal Health and Husbandry Technologist (NAAHHT). This forum really bought the conscience and admiration of our members. The paraprofessionals were given room to air their views, bare their minds on policy formulation, inter-relationship between colleagues and interrelated issues concerning our practice.

It became a ritual and issues discussed at that level were driven down to the grass root for implementation. It was a frank talk forum. This forum was a veterinary statutory body personified, widely accepted by both parties and it enjoyed acceptable representation. Decisions taken there were binding.

Unfortunately, with turns in recent events, it seems that the erstwhile Vet. Council President was voted out alongside his initiative.

This is why our shift should be attitudinal. We must Practice Professionalism not Professism. Professism like racism or tribalism is discriminatory. Everyone in the medical team is like a finger on a palm; each one is important.

Alberta Association of Animal Health technologist in their website describes the characteristics of an Animal Health Technologist Professional as;

- Confident in working with Animals
- A strong interest in medicine,
- Ability to work quickly and decisively under pressure
- Good manual dexterity
- Aptitude for mathematics, record keeping and writing reports
- Good organizational skill
- Good physical health and strength
- High degree of integrity
- Excellent communication and inter personal skills
- Ability to work well in a team environment
- They should therefore enjoy having clear roles, rules and guidelines for their work and performing laboratory and diagnostic procedures.

For me, I think these are not just personal characteristics of an Animal Health technologist they are personal characteristics of a nation builder.

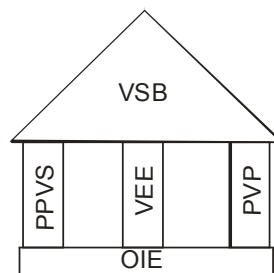
I therefore wish to call on all of us here to rise up, not rise and fight, but rise to build a united front where veterinary and indeed Animal Health practice shall take it rightful position not only on the face of Africa but all over the world.

Ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, world and sub-regional governing bodies of this great profession; I cannot conclude this talk without taking excerpts from the Global Conference on Veterinary Education establishment and the role of veterinary statutory bodies held in Brazil from 4-6 December 2013, of which I was a delegate.

It was a wonderful and well organized conference; however, I wish to stress that the success of OIE as an Apex body lies in the composition and operation of the veterinary statutory bodies (VSBs) as a regulatory body and the Veterinary Education Establishment (VEE) as a sincere steamship for upgrading competency, not only for the vets but also for the para-professionals. Para-professionals should have minor but basic input in the formulation and composition of academic curriculum. The present generational dilution of academic curriculum is as a travesty on our Academic Educational Programme (AEP).

Every stakeholder in Animal Health Care and welfare must be carried along. As the assembly rightly said in Brazil, “we are not trying to assume the position of world police”, and that “No singular educational curriculum should be adopted world wide - Dr. Bernard Vallat. It is therefore my view that VSB’s should be constituted considering the peculiarities of participating councils just like Educational Curriculums. Dr. Michael Bauster rightly cautioned that para-professionals should be incorporated into the VSBS, since they already had a legally organized body; leaving them out will create serious regulatory problems, especially those who do not fall under the control of the VSB e.g. the Community Health and some controversial private veterinarians.

In light of the above and from the thought I generated in that conference, I recommend a tripod diagrammatic representation of a typical VSB thus;



- PPVS - Public Private Veterinary Services.
Animal Health Care and Welfare Services.
- VEE - Veterinary Educational Establishment (Deans of faculties of veterinary medicine) Development of Skills and Competences to be acquired by both the veterinarians and para-professionals.
- PVP - Para-professionals – Follow ups and Complementary Services.

CONCLUSION

It is my view therefore that, veterinary authorities need not automatically be the VSB of a country but must be part of it. A good arrangement between participating professionals would produce a VSB that is amenable and enduring.

Ladies and Gentlemen, colleagues, world and sub-regional governing bodies of this great profession, I wish to commend you for your wonderful audience. Thank you and God bless.

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