Promoting antimicrobial stewardship for the betterment of society

Antimicrobial resistance is a growing health risk for animals and people. Preserving antimicrobial effectiveness, while still providing optimal care for our animal patients, means that good stewardship must be top-of-mind in every veterinary practice.

As veterinarians, we are trusted leaders and stewards in preserving the effectiveness of antimicrobials. And your national association recently took important steps to help the veterinary profession prevent the spread of antimicrobial resistance.

Back in January, the AVMA House of Delegates unanimously approved the “Antimicrobial Stewardship Definition and Core Principles,” which defines antimicrobial stewardship as “the actions veterinarians take individually and as a profession to preserve the effectiveness and availability of antimicrobial drugs through conscientious oversight and responsible medical decision-making while safeguarding animal, public, and environmental health.”

The core principles adopted by the AVMA include:

- A clearly stated commitment by veterinarians to stewardship;
- Support for systems of care that include a multi-pronged approach to preventing common diseases;
- Judicious selection and use of antimicrobial drugs;
- Ongoing evaluation of antimicrobial drug-use practices; and
- A commitment to professional education and research that expands the profession’s knowledge base and supports good decision-making.

The definition and core principles were developed by our Committee on Antimicrobials, which is comprised of individuals representing a diverse array of veterinary organizational, species, and practice interests. Because this policy was unanimously approved by the House of Delegates, which consists of representatives from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and 18 allied veterinary associations, you can be confident that it represents the consensus of the veterinary profession.

The AVMA’s new policy parallels the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s “Core Elements of Outpatient Antibiotic Stewardship Programs,” which provide a similar framework for antimicrobial stewardship for individuals working in outpatient human health-care facilities. By building on parallel goals, the AVMA and its Committee on Antimicrobials hope to encourage and support better collaboration between veterinary medicine and human medicine. It’s important that we embrace shared values and build consensus on stewardship.

Defining stewardship and providing core principles is an important first step in fulfilling our commitment to provide resources and tools that will assist veterinarians in conscientious decision-making when it comes to the use of antimicrobials.

Judicious use is both an individual and a profession-wide responsibility. Abiding by these core principles is key to preserving the effectiveness and availability of these critically important drugs.

So, what’s next?

The AVMA is collaborating with various allied veterinary organizations on the creation of resources and tools to help educate veterinarians about stewardship and to help you develop stewardship plans for your practice. We also are exploring opportunities to collaborate with the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges on reinforcing commitments to good stewardship within our veterinary colleges. And we are working to enhance the AVMA website to include a centralized location for antimicrobial resources.

It is our goal to ensure that all veterinarians, no matter their area of practice, understand their role in the proper use of antimicrobials and in preventing resistance. We believe that good stewardship is the best approach to mitigating resistance while ensuring that we continue to have access to effective antimicrobials to treat our patients.

We are committed to this task. As part of our duty to lead the veterinary profession’s work on antimicrobial stewardship, we stand ready to provide our service, our science, and our expertise.

Michael J. Topper, DVM, PhD, DACVP

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