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Veterinary Medicine in China

Dr. Ole Stalheim

Editor's Note: Dr. Ole Stalheim was the guest speaker at the annual banquet sponsored by the Iowa State University Student Chapter of the AVMA on February 11, 1984. Below is a summary of his experiences.

I first went to China in 1974 and met several veterinarians. I returned in August of 1983 at the invitation of Professor Qin Li Rang, and lectured for four weeks on cattle diseases at the Central China Agricultural College, Wuhan, to 60 veterinarians from 24 of the provinces of the People's Republic of China. Mrs. Stalheim taught English there; she and I were comfortable in the college guest house. The food was good, the people were very friendly, and the lectures were well-received. With a guide/translator, we toured the scenic Guilin area and spent a week in Beijing as guests of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Information about Chinese veterinary education and service is not readily available. The following was obtained from officials at the Central China Agricultural College, the Bureau of Education of the Ministry of Agriculture, and from students and professors.

There are two levels of veterinary training in China; the first level requires two years of college training and the other requires five years. In addition, there are a few highly trained individuals with graduate degrees from universities in Europe or the United States, and some "barefoot" veterinarians still serve in rural areas. There are three levels of governmental service: assistant veterinarian, veterinarian, and higher veterinarian. It is estimated that there are 200,000 veterinarians in China and "several 10's of thousands" with five year degrees. Each province, municipality, and autonomous region has at least one veterinary college and a veterinary diagnostic laboratory. The teachers also do research, but most research is done in institutes administered by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Each fall, about 50 students enter each of the veterinary schools. The selection is based on the nationwide examinations at the high schools and on aptitude and attitude (evidence

of motivation is less important now than in previous years). The training is free and students receive a salary to cover their expenses. The academic year consists of two semesters with a summer vacation in August and a break in February. Examinations are given regularly. Grading is from A to F; about 5% of the students fail. Upon completion of final examinations and presentation of a satisfactory thesis, they are graduated and assigned to positions in the provinces. If they fail either requirement, they are given a job at a lower salary with the privilege of repeating the examination after one year. A few students stay on for graduate work.

After the Revolution, the Central China Agricultural College was built on a peninsula extending out into South Lake in the southeast part of Wuhan, a large city on the Yangtze River. It is one of the seven major agricultural colleges in China and has China's only School of Water Products with extensive studies on the diseases of fish. Only minimal damage was sustained during the revolution. The College maintains a dairy herd of about 80 Holsteins in lactation. They are bred artificially, tested regularly for tuberculosis and brucellosis, and milked by machine. The milk is pasteurized and delivered to the college dining halls; it is served hot. The college has 1600 pigs, many chickens and ducks, and a small herd of native, red cattle for teaching purposes. The college farm consists of 400 acres tended by 300 workers; the major studies are in grain production and horticulture. The veterinary hospital is a new two-story building for clinical work, teaching and research. It is not yet fully equipped. The college does not produce vaccines for animals; that is done at an institute in Wuhan or at a central facility in Beijing. Ambulatory veterinary service is not available from the college. Veterinarians in the communes do all the routine services; when necessary, they have a small, three-wheeled vehicle for transportation to the college or provincial laboratory.

The combined department of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Science (the usual ar-

rangement in China) occupies a large, five-story building near the center of the campus adjacent to the Central Research Laboratory—a well-equipped facility for chemical and physical studies. But the buildings are dark, dirty and need painting. The classrooms and laboratories are small and crowded; the equipment is old but adequate by standards when I was in school (1941).

Sixty students, I was told, are enrolled each year in the curriculum leading to a bachelor degree in veterinary science. In five years, they receive 3700 hours of instruction in 34 subjects: the basic course of 12 subjects, 12 specialty courses, and 10 clinical courses. Only three courses are currently available on the graduate level (MS degree), but the number will soon reach 12. The 29 weeks of practical work include nine weeks of teaching practice on the campus during the second and third years; eight weeks of clinical work in the hospital the fourth year; and 12 weeks the fifth year at a commune or provincial veterinary facility. About 15% of the graduates continue their studies toward an advanced degree in China or abroad.

The Pathology section has a staff of three instructors and three graduate assistants; it has a large museum of pathological specimens. The graduate program (MS degree) will soon be expanded to include food inspection. Articles on leptospirosis, schistosomiasis, and enzootic bovine leukemia were published recently in Chinese journals. Overall, the department has 91 teachers, including 20 professors, and 33 laboratory technicians. It has 19 laboratory or teaching rooms. I also visited the Anatomy, Physiology, Pharmacology, and Microbiology sections.

Traditional Chinese medicine is taught with large transparent models of the pig and other animals. Prof. Yer Quindian is experimenting with a laser to replace acupuncture needles, and electricity for therapy and anesthesia. He showed me a large room full of specimens of plants; many are still being used for herbal therapy in China.

By daily contact during weeks of lectures, Mrs. Stalheim and I became well-acquainted with several Chinese, particularly our translators.

On the night of the Moon Festival, September 21 this year, a few people came to sit in the light of the full moon, eat moon cakes (round fat cookies with figures imprinted) and again

tell the ancient myth "Chang Er Flies to the Moon:"

"Once upon a time, a beautiful lady in a palace was always lonely. She gazed up at the moon. Until one full moon at autumn, Chang Er went to the moon and was welcomed by Wo gang—the Old Man in the Moon—with wine and gui (cinnamon) flowers."

Since then all Chinese families gather this festival night, to eat moon cakes, and perhaps sip wine, in gladness for the joys of family life. College students who cannot celebrate with their families join with friends, and rededicate themselves to their tasks.

As we watched the moon move through the bright sky, they told me of the Spring Festival in honor of "Ching Ming:"

"Once upon a time, the King was attacked and betrayed. When in danger from death by cold, a minor official came to his aid. When they faced death by starvation, he even cut off some of his own flesh and fed the dying king. He recovered his strength and his kingdom.

He then rewarded his followers but forgot about Ching Ming, the minor official, who departed with his mother into a dark forest.

Later, the King remembered Ching Ming and his services and decided to richly reward him. A decree was issued that he should return for his reward, but he did not.

Finally, the King ordered the forest to be set afire saying "he will come down and I shall reward him, because he loves his mother dearly."

Ching Ming and his mother considered whether to accept the belated reward. Being very wise and indifferent to wealth, they decided to decline. Later their bodies were found beside a huge willow tree."

Ever since then, the willow tree has been a revered tree. On the day of the Ching Ming festival in April, in memory of that fire, no one in China burns wood; but they eat a special, cold, rice cake wrapped in fragrant leaves. The children make wreaths and the family goes to the cemetery to clean and decorate it in memory of Ching Ming, the loyal official.

Myths, festivals, and families are a fundamental part of the Chinese culture. Each year, large numbers of the brightest young Chinese elect to study veterinary medicine. I believe they will rapidly advance veterinary services in their country and contribute in a major way to the progress of veterinary science and education.