

Guest Editorial

The Enigma of Rabies Control

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Introduction:

Immediately after the Great World War II, countries like the U.K., Australia and New Zealand controlled and eradicated Canine Rabies by strict **Import Control with mandatory six months' quarantine** on dogs, cats and related species, **eradication of all unwanted and stray dogs in the country** and **vaccination of all dogs** above the ages of eight weeks with the new freeze dried vaccine, all under mandatory regulations. This was followed suit by S. E. Asian countries like Malaya, Sarawak, Brunei, Singapore as also Taiwan and Japan all of which became Rabies free and remain so as per the FAO/WHO/OIE reports.

Discussion:

I have no working experience in India but I had an overall knowledge of the Rabies situation from the various FAO meetings I had attended and my frequent visits to this country. It was well known that Canine Rabies was highly endemic with the staggering and formidable stray dog population wandering freely in the streets and residential areas of the country. All foreigners visiting this country were informed, inter alia, about the presence of large numbers of stray dogs and the danger from them.

I remember one significant instance where a Dutch friend of mine working in the Royal Dutch Oil Company in Brunei, who was very much interested in archaeology, wanted to visit Hampi from where the Vijayanagaram Empire had extended to S. E. Asia. Accordingly in 1965, he accompanied us to Bangalore from where we went to Hampi by road. He was horrified with the freely roaming huge numbers of stray dogs all the way and also in Hampi. Unfortunately, on the banks of the Tungabhadra where there were lots of stray dogs he was bitten by one with a fairly big wound as he was wearing only shorts. At that time there were no facilities for treatment of animal bites at Hampi and with the wound washed with soap we rushed him to Bangalore where the Medical facilities only offered the start of the 14 injections of Semple vaccine. He refused to take that

and took the next flight to Paris from Bombay to proceed to Holland. Later on I understood that he got the proper Rabies treatment in Paris and he was hale and healthy when I next met him in Brunei. However, this was bad publicity for this country for obvious reasons.

After retiring and settling in Bangalore I assumed as the Head of the Stray Dog Free Bangalore SDFB a registered society started by a group of energetic young men and women. Together we campaigned vigorously in senior educational institutions, societies and media, the public health hazards by stray dogs and the necessity of eliminating them much in the same way as elimination of mosquitoes and rats in human malaria and plague. The SDFB also held a general meeting in which extensive publicity was given on the medical importance of eliminating stray dogs. I also attended few meetings of the Health Committee of the Bangalore Municipal Council where I stressed the importance of eliminating stray dogs if we have to make the city, state and eventually the nation Rabies free.

My views and recommendations were opposed by many groups belonging to the Animal activist clan. The Municipal Corporation in association with these groups had launched a "novel idea" of Animal Birth Control Program called the ABC Program with which I couldn't agree professionally. I resigned as President SDFB due to my family receiving threatening calls.

I was proud to be made an Honorary Member of the Association for the Prevention and Control of Rabies in India which is doing a magnificent job in the field of preventing human Rabies and treating bitten persons by dogs, cats and similar animals which can transmit rabies, by introducing the latest types of Freeze dried human vaccines and life saving immunoglobulin via the latest routes. On the global look the APCRI is doing a meticulous job in the field of Rabies, and the medical and health officers who are members of the APCRI, are well versed and equipped with the latest techniques of immunization and treatment of human beings exposed to the disease.