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Perspective

Zoonotic Infectious Diseases and the One Health Approach

Jonathan P. Reed*

Department of Global Infectious Diseases, Western Coast University Hospital, Monterey, California, USA

DESCRIPTION

Zoonotic infectious diseases-those transmitted between animals and humans-represent a growing and complex challenge to global health. From long-recognized diseases such as rabies and brucellosis to emerging threats like Ebola, avian influenza, and COVID-19, zoonoses account for a substantial proportion of human infectious diseases. From my perspective, the increasing frequency and impact of zoonotic outbreaks reflect profound changes in how humans interact with animals and the environment. Addressing these threats effectively requires a shift away from siloed thinking toward an integrated framework, best exemplified by the One Health approach.

The drivers of zoonotic disease emergence are deeply interconnected. Population growth, urbanization, deforestation, intensive agriculture, wildlife trade, and climate change have increased contact between humans, domestic animals, and wildlife. As natural habitats shrink, pathogens that once circulated primarily among animals find new opportunities to cross species barriers. In my view, many zoonotic outbreaks are not random events but predictable consequences of unsustainable environmental and agricultural practices. Recognizing these root causes is essential for prevention, not just response.

Traditional public health and veterinary systems have often operated independently, focusing narrowly on human or animal health. While this approach has yielded successes in specific contexts, it is increasingly inadequate for managing zoonotic threats. The one health approach, which promotes collaboration among human health, animal health, and environmental sectors, offers a more holistic and realistic framework. From my perspective, one health is not merely a conceptual model but a practical necessity in a world where disease ecology is shaped by complex human-animal-environment interactions.

Surveillance is a critical area where one health principles can make a substantial difference. Early detection of zoonotic threats often depends on monitoring animal populations for unusual disease patterns before widespread human transmission occurs. Integrating veterinary surveillance, wildlife monitoring, and human health data can provide early warning signals and improve outbreak preparedness. I believe that investing in cross-sectoral surveillance systems is one of the most cost-effective strategies for preventing zoonotic pandemics.

Prevention of zoonotic diseases also requires coordinated action across sectors. Vaccination of animals, regulation of wildlife trade, biosecurity in livestock production, and environmental protection all contribute to reducing spillover risk. From my perspective, these interventions are often undervalued because their benefits are indirect or long-term. However, preventing a single major zoonotic outbreak can save countless lives and enormous economic costs, making prevention a sound investment rather than a luxury.

The one health approach also highlights the importance of community engagement and education. Many zoonotic diseases are closely linked to cultural practices, livelihoods, and local ecosystems. Effective interventions must therefore be context-specific and developed in partnership with affected communities. We believe that respecting local knowledge and addressing socioeconomic realities strengthens trust and improves the sustainability of disease control efforts. Without community involvement, even well-designed one health initiatives are unlikely to succeed.

Despite its clear advantages, implementing the one health approach faces significant challenges. Institutional silos, fragmented funding, and limited cross-disciplinary training hinder collaboration. In my view, overcoming these barriers requires strong political commitment, clear governance structures, and investment in education that prepares professionals to work across disciplines. International organizations and national governments must move beyond rhetoric and embed one health principles into policy, planning, and resource allocation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, zoonotic infectious diseases will continue to pose a serious threat as long as human, animal, and environmental health are treated as separate concerns. From my perspective, the one health approach offers the most comprehensive and

Correspondence to: Jonathan P. Reed, Department of Global Infectious Diseases, Western Coast University Hospital, Monterey, California, USA, Email: jpreed@wcuh.edu

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forward-looking strategy for addressing these challenges. By fostering collaboration, strengthening surveillance, prioritizing prevention, and engaging communities, one health provides a pathway toward more effective and sustainable control of zoonotic diseases in an increasingly interconnected world.