

Dr. Christina Morris DVM
AVMA Member
Portland, OR 97212
(816)-695-8855

To the Senate Committee on Health Care

I am a small animal vet living in Portland and working in Vancouver. I own dogs, cats, chickens and a horse at that I care for. I use antibiotics every day in our practice but also know that they are too often considered a catch-all treatment. Pet owners sometimes request antibiotics over the phone as a fix for a problem I have never seen and cannot confirm. We of course do not honor these requests as we cannot prescribe antibiotics without examining the animal. If we do not examine the animal, we cannot be sure that we are prescribing the right antibiotic for the ailment. I wondered, then, why antibiotics are fed to large groups of farm animals on a daily basis for preventative purposes. And what, if anything, are these antibiotics treating?

When a patient comes into the clinic there is often some guess-work necessary, as animals cannot tell us where it hurts. We sometimes need to prescribe antibiotics to stop an infection we think may develop in the future in a cut or illness we see in our patients. We base our antibiotic choice on those bacteria that are most likely to cause a problem in the skin, gastrointestinal tract, eye, etc. Using antibiotics without a medically evident reason, however, carries the possibility for side effects in the animal, and may inadvertently select for those bacteria that carry the genes allowing them to survive, leading to antibiotic resistance.

According to the FDA 70% of medically important antibiotics approved for food-producing animals that are sold were used for production or production and therapeutic indications in 2011 meaning that only 30% of antibiotics sold in this country were used for therapeutic indications. Most of the animals receiving these drugs are not sick. From what I have learned, the only reasons these drugs are administered daily basis are: 1) to keep the animals disease free in unnecessarily unsanitary and overcrowded conditions, and 2) to make them grow faster to decrease the time between their coming into this world and becoming dinner. While this business model is important to the farmer who depends on these livestock for his livelihood, it is not a sustainable practice.

The World Health Organization warns that we may enter a “post-antibiotic era” wherein the infections that have been successfully treated in humans for decades will once again kill. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that in the United States alone 23,000 people die as a result of antibiotic-resistant infections each year, and more than 2,000,000 fall ill.

As a veterinarian I believe it is time for livestock producers to take control of their side of this problem. Right now the Oregon State Legislature has the opportunity to pass Senate Bill 920, which would stop the untargeted use of antibiotics for industrial purposes and sustain these life-saving treatments for the truly sick. I am a medical professional and I understand the power of these drugs. Whether your patients are humans or animals, these drugs are too important to become resistant to, and we cannot practice medicine as we know it without them.

Sincerely,
Dr. Christina Morris

Sources:

"2011 Summary Report on Antimicrobials Sold or Distributed for Use in Food-Producing Animals." Food and Drug Administration Department of Health and Human Services, Sept. 2014. Web. 27 Mar. 2015.

"Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2013." U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013. Web. 27 Mar. 2015.