

8. Summary

A history of preventive veterinary medicine with special reference to developments in canine prophylaxis

The development of disease prevention and control through the various phases of human history to discover how and when the prophylactic approach emerged in veterinary medicine is on an historical basis evaluated. The dog is the focus of the study and the basis for comparison because of the range of canine infectious diseases, especially Rabies, Distemper and Parvovirus.

The initial stages in the development of prophylactic thinking were set against a framework of religious rules and customs. Human existence, however, was beginning to reflect changes in social life, demographic processes and in political, moral and ethical viewpoints, which together shaped the views and attitudes towards disease prevention and control. The application of hygiene standards was at each stage a response to social and economic conditions.

In Antiquity, people were trying to introduce preventive measures to maintain health. In Ancient Greece, prophylaxis was a central concept in the development of human medicine. In the area of animal health care, the Greeks also developed detailed prophylactic procedures and dietary instruction.

Developments in the Middle Ages reflected demographic changes and societal upheaval. Christianity saw little improvement in the implementation of hygiene and sanitation. At no other time was the care and treatment of the domestic dog so radically different from what it had been in the previous epoch. Status – dependent attitudes towards the dog produced different and, in part, catastrophic consequences for canine care, training and health.

At the beginning of the Modern Age, the focus of attention in science returned to an examination of ancient wisdom. Dietary improvements were achieved from the circulation of information about personal hygiene in the expanding public education systems. The understanding of canine health needs is apparent in the circulating documentation, especially in the hunting literature. The search for scientific advances increased awareness of the potential for the prevention of human illness and disease. In the Enlightenment, health care gained an even greater priority across society. The health status of groups and communities became the focus for improvements.

In the current epoch, the growing power of the emerging middle – class changed attitudes towards domestic dogs. Increased affection for the domestic dog has gone hand in hand with expanding efforts to prevent and control canine illness and disease.

In veterinary medicine, the scientific foundation for prophylaxis was strengthened with the establishment of schools of veterinary medicine. Intensive research into canine disease and its prevention expanded. Despite the use of many different prophylactic measures, infectious

diseases like Rabies, Distemper and Parvovirus continue to be epidemic and result in high canine mortality. Only with the development of immunisation has it been possible to limit the impact of these infectious diseases in some countries. Advances in the protection of human health have contributed significantly to prophylaxis for animals as the fight against diseases which transfer from animals to man has continued, especially against Rabies. The immunisation of foxes has achieved a fundamental improvement in the control of Rabies across Europe.

Generally, the successful implementation of prophylactic measures across a wide front for animals and humans alike is only possible when it has support throughout society.