

One Health History Question:

Who coined the term “One Medicine”?

Answer: Dr. Calvin Schwabe coined the “One Medicine” term and crystallized the concept in the 20th century.

***By Bruce Kaplan, DVM and Cheryl Scott, RN, NP, DVM, MPVM**

A re-examination of historically valid references appears to verify that the American veterinarian, **Calvin W. Schwabe, DVM, MPH, ScD** originally coined the term “One Medicine” and represented it to designate the concept associated therewith (4, 5). Among other reference sources, **Dr. Schwabe** demonstrated how statements and actions taken by the great 19th century German physician **Rudolf Virchow, MD**, the father of cellular pathology, bolstered the case for **Schwabe’s** original “One Medicine concept” proposition (5). **Dr. Virchow** said, “between animal and human medicine there are no dividing lines--nor should there be.” (9)

A literature review of **Dr. William Osler’s** writings (6, 7) plus two prominent biographies (2, 3) found no personal usage of the term “One Medicine”, but his alliance with veterinary medicine and veterinarians is historically unquestioned, at least during his early teaching and medical career in the 19th century. According to all available documented references, **Dr. Osler** would have supported **Dr. Schwabe’s** proposal having been strongly influenced by his teacher and pathology mentor **Dr. Virchow** (who most certainly would have concurred).

Known as the father of modern medicine and the father of Internal medicine, the great Canadian physician **Sir William Osler**, was a 19th and early 20th century practitioner of modern day “One Medicine-One Health” collaborative principles. One example: while teaching at the Montreal Veterinary College, **Dr. Osler** organized a significant study of parasites in the pork supply of Montreal with one of his most brilliant veterinary students, **Albert W. Clement**. The two concluded, correctly, that thorough cooking of pork was the best protection against humans contracting parasitic illnesses when ingesting this meat. **Dr. Clement**, a veterinarian, later became a President of the United States Veterinary Medical Association now the American Veterinary Medical Association or AVMA. (1, 2, 3).

Several readers of the One Health Initiative website have asked how the misleading assumption developed that **Dr. William Osler** coined the term. It appears that this issue originated from a 2000 publication on page 231 (8) stating “The phrase “One Medicine” is attributed to Sir William Osler who studied with Virchow and worked with other veterinarians and physicians who were involved in both medical branches.” No reference for this assumption was cited although one other reference was noted relative to Virchow’s appreciation for veterinary medicine (9) vis-à-vis

human medicine. Regrettably, this unsubstantiated comment has been perpetuated since in other One Health publications.

Today, "One Medicine" is commonly referred to as "One Health" worldwide. This terminology change occurred during the first decade of the 21st century.

"One Health" is the evolution of the earlier used term "One Medicine" which historically implied the crossing over between veterinarians and physicians.

One Health recognizes that humans do not exist in isolation, but are a part of a larger whole, a living ecosystem, and that activities of each member affect the others. Thus, One Health considers health as a whole, the humans, the animals, and the environment they exist on.

References:

1. Kahn LH, Kaplan B, Steele JH. Confronting zoonoses through closer collaboration between medicine and veterinary medicine (as 'One Medicine') *Veterinaria Italiana* 2007; 43: 5-19. http://www.izs.it/vet_italiana/2007/43_1/5_19.pdf ; and the One Health Initiative Autonomous *pro bono* team.
2. Bliss, Michael. *William Osler, A Life in Medicine*. Oxford University Press, 1999.
3. ["The Life of Sir William Osler" by Harvey Cushing](#), 1925 Ed. (Courtesy Chris Lyons, MA, Dip. Ed, MLIS, Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University)
4. Schwabe, C. *Veterinary medicine and human health*, 3rd ed. Baltimore: Williams and Wilkins: 1984. (especially see Chapter 1)
5. U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *EID Journal*, "One Medicine" for Animal and Human Health, Volume 10, Number 12–December 2004. http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/eid/vol10no12/about_cover.htm.
6. Personal Communication: Chris Lyons, MA, Dip. Ed, MLIS, Associate Librarian, Osler Library of the History of Medicine, McGill University (March 17, 2011).
7. The Evolution of Modern Medicine A series of Lectures delivered at Yale in April, 1913 by William Osler: "immediately turned into the Yale University Press for publication."
8. Dukes TW. The other branch of medicine: an historiography of veterinary medicine from a Canadian perspective. *Can Bull Med Hist* 2000; 17:229-243.
9. L.Z. Saunders. "Commentary: Virchow's Contribution to Veterinary Medicine, Celebrated Then, Forgotten now, "Veterinary Pathology, 37, 3 (2000): 199-207.

One Health opinions, comments and verifiable corrections are welcomed by the One Health Initiative website. Please submit to kkm@onehealthinitiative.com for consideration.

***Dr. Bruce Kaplan** is a member of the One Health Initiative website team along with **Laura H. Kahn, MD, MPH, MPP, Thomas P. Monath, MD, and Jack Woodall, PhD**. He also serves as Contributing Editor on the editorial board of the Florida State Department of Health's Environmental Health Division (USA) One Health Newsletter.

Dr. Cheryl Scott is the program director of the Calvin Schwabe One Health Project <http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/onehealth/> at the University of California's (UC Davis) School of Veterinary Medicine in Davis, California (USA). Contact e-mail: cascott@ucdavis.edu