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 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

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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 19\textsuperscript{th} 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 19\textsuperscript{th} 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 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} 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:

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.”

One Health opinions, comments and verifiable corrections are welcomed by the One Health Initiative website. Please submit to [kkm@onehealthinitive.com](mailto:kkm@onehealthinitive.com) for consideration.

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