

Vets learn how to track disease

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Fourteen veterinarians from Indonesia are learning how to track and stop the spread of animal borne diseases in a three-week training program hosted by the University of Sydney.

The program is part of the Australian Aid Agency (AusAid) Australian Leadership Awards Fellowships (ALAF) program and aims to equip Indonesian veterinary epidemiologists with important skills to improve surveillance, detection and monitoring of animal borne diseases.

"Animal borne diseases that cause a high rate of death when humans are infected, such as bird flu and rabies, are an immediate problem in Indonesia. They are a real concern to animal owners posing a threat not only to their health but also to their livelihood, particularly for subsistence farmers" said Jenny-Ann Toribio, Senior Lecturer in Epidemiology, Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney.

"This Fellowship program aims to strengthen the capacity of government, non-government (NGO) and research institutions across Indonesia, including the national Disease Investigation Centre (DIC) network, by building capability and expertise in disease detection, risk assessment and surveillance," she said.

The Fellows include key senior staff and younger veterinarians from a diverse range of geographical regions in Indonesia who are all members of the newly established Indonesian Veterinary Epidemiology Association (IVEA).

"It is very beneficial for all of us to be traveling around NSW together as we are all from different institutions and it helps build a strong network of veterinary epidemiologists across Indonesia," said Dr Agung from the DIC in Denpasar.

"A strong network is the key component to ensure the ongoing implementation of the approaches we are learning about here with the University of Sydney," he said.

While in Australia, they will learn about the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) in Camden before heading to Canberra to visit the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry. They will then travel to the Gold Coast for the Science Week conference of the Epidemiology Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists and finally to Orange to be hosted by the NSW Department of Primary Industries and trained in risk management in animal health.

Dr Arief Riana Aryani is a vet for the Centre for Indonesian Veterinary Analytical Studies and is the youngest of the Fellows joining the study tour in Australia.

"This training adds to our ability to identify disease and also to look at methods for managing animal disease. As an NGO working in this field, we believe we can be the bridge between Government and the community by training people at home in Indonesia to learn these skills," she said.

"I believe that if everyone knew what a Global Positioning System (GPS) and GIS can do in managing the spread of animal borne diseases, such as our Government and our community, then the potential of this could be limitless."

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