

Survey on the Causes of the Low Efficacy of Active Clinical Surveillance of BSE in Italy

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Clinical surveillance is an important component of BSE surveillance systems. In Italy, active surveillance is carried out by public health veterinarians to identify clinically suspect animals, but its efficacy appears very low; with few clinical suspect cases notified. We therefore conducted a survey to better understand content and quality of the surveillance conducted on farms, the attitudes of public veterinarians involved in this operation and the association of these variables with the training received by the veterinary staff. In 8 regions of Italy a questionnaire was distributed by mail to a sample of local health unit veterinarians. Univariate and multivariate analysis was performed on the 494 completed questionnaires. Of those interviewed, 75.8% (IC 95%: 71.7-79.5) visit each farm twice yearly as indicated in the national plan, but only 24.2% (IC 95%: 20.5-28.3) use more detailed and sensitive screening strategies. BSE was considered a priority problem by 20.4% (IC 95%: 16.9-24.4), and only 56.5% (IC 95%: 51.7-61.2) considered clinical herd checks to be efficacious for BSE surveillance. Only 17.0% (IC 95%: 13.9-20.7) had a good understanding of the consequences of the notification of a BSE suspect. In the multivariate model neither the quality of the checks nor the veterinarians' attitudes were associated with the training they had received. Considering the low efficacy of training in influencing attitudes and practice, other strategies need to be identified to improve the efficacy of the clinical surveillance or to evaluate the possibility of changing the surveillance strategy.