

CONTROL OF HYDATIDS

Country Dog Owners Must Assist In Checking the Disease

By SIR LOUIS BARNETT, Emeritus Professor of Surgery, University of Otago, and Chairman of the Hydatids Committee.

IN the following article Sir Louis Barnett emphasises the need for something more than persuasive measures if the spread of hydatids in this country is to be checked. He points out that years of intensive and systematic propaganda designed to educate people have yielded discouraging results, and he has something to say to some country dog owners for their lack of co-operation. "A considerable number of more intelligent dog owners," he states, "do try to keep their dogs free of the parasite worms . . . but unfortunately there is a considerable number—perhaps, indeed, the majority whose attitude is apathetic, neglectful, or even scornful."

IN a recent statement Mr. R. A. Nicol, S.P.C.A. Inspector for the Wellington Province, points out the harmful effect of allowing hungry dogs to wander about the farms and countryside seeking what they might devour. Not only do they seize upon discarded offal when an animal is slaughtered at the homestead, but they nose around in distant pastures, and if they find a dead sheep they tear into its inside for the food they lack.

Mr. Nicol deserves the thanks of the community for his plain speaking, and no doubt many dog owners will profit by his helpful advice. Many will read it and heed it, but, alas, many will do neither. That conclusion has been arrived at by the Hydatid Committee—Drs. Hercus and D'Ath, of Dunedin, Dr. Ritchie, of Wellington, and Dr. Hopkirk, of Wellington, with myself as chairman—after years of intensive and expensive efforts on educational and persuasive propaganda. We have concentrated mainly on an attempt to drive home the importance of the two outstanding lines of prevention, namely,

1. Not allowing dogs to feed on raw offal, such as the liver and lungs of sheep.
2. Dosing dogs regularly with a safe and efficient worm-expelling medicine, such as arecoline.

Risks to Children

The other precautions advised—those for example, that deal with the evils of food, water, and hand pollution by dogs, and with the special risks to children from caressing country dogs—are of importance, too, but not to be compared in preventive value with the two first mentioned.

Over and over again these recommendations and the reasons for them have been brought under the notice of dog owners in the hope that the knowledge imparted, plus a little commonsense, would lead to their widespread adoption, and now, after years of this educational and persuasive campaign, what is the result? A considerable number of the more intelligent dog owners do try to keep their dogs free of parasitic worms. They do feed them properly and dose them regularly. On their farms and in their districts it has been noted that the prevalence of hydatid disease has been reduced.

But, unfortunately, there is also a considerable number of dog owners—perhaps, indeed, the majority—whose attitude is apathetic, or neglectful, or scornful. Their dogs continue to harbour and spread the hydatid parasite, and New Zealand remains a country notorious for its prevalence.

Persuasive Methods

The New Zealand Government has so far favoured persuasive methods only. It is true that last year legislation was passed making it illegal to feed dogs on raw offal, but no steps have been taken so far to enforce this measure. The practical difficulties associated with enforcement have no doubt led to this hesitation.

The Government also distributes annually worm-expelling medicine in the form of arecoline tablets, with full instructions for use, to every dog owner at the time of dog registration. By law, the dog owners have to pay an extra registration fee of one shilling to cover the cost of the tablets, but there is no law compelling them to

dose their dogs, and a very large number neglect or refuse to do so.

There are about 200,000 dogs in New Zealand (1 in 8 of the population), most of them country dogs, and of these about one-third are carriers of the hydatid tapeworm. The dog, be it remembered, is the only animal in this country that harbours the parasite in the worm stage, and the dog, therefore, is the sole distributor of the hydatid eggs, which, if swallowed by other farm animals or by human beings, grow into cysts.

Every year a hundred or more new cases of hydatid disease are admitted into our hospitals. About 14 per cent. of these cases end fatally, and the others may suffer years of disability.

Millions of Carriers

There are approximately 32 million sheep in this country, and nearly half of them harbour hydatid cysts in liver and lungs. The lives of these animals are short compared with human existence, and the cysts they carry have not, as a rule, had time to cause notable impairment in the quality of wool or meat.

The farmer reckons on getting the same price for his sheep whether they have cysts or not, and unless one of his own family falls a victim to hydatid infection he is apt to think preventive measures are not worth bothering about.

If he thought hydatid prevalence would hit him economically he would probably take more notice, and, as a matter of fact, he does unwittingly share in a considerable economic loss. All animals killed in abattoirs and freezing works are inspected by veterinary officials, and every liver that harbours visible hydatid cysts is con-

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