

Voluntary participation & mobile reporting for surveillance – a one-year experience

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Background

Clinical observations made by veterinary practitioners and reported in real time using web- and mobile-based communication tools may benefit disease surveillance by improving the timeliness of outbreak detection.

We discuss our experiences with the practitioner-based Swiss surveillance system Equinella during its first operational year. Telephone interviews were carried out with 11 sentinel veterinarians to

- 1) better understand motivations and constraints to sustainable participation in a voluntary system
- 2) judge the suitability of mobile devices (e.g. smartphones or tablets) to collect animal health data for surveillance

Equinella

Equinella is a voluntary reporting and information system established for the early detection of infectious equine diseases. Swiss sentinel practitioners can report cases of non-notifiable diseases as well as clinical symptoms to an internet-based platform using computers or mobile devices in real time.

Non-monetary incentives to participate are offered such as regular information feedback, a free continuing professional development course per year or the use of a smartphone (Fig. 1).



Figure 1 Smartphone of robust condition suitable for outdoor use (ToughShield R500+, www.tough-shield.com)

Voluntary participation

A relatively high participation of sentinel veterinarians was found during the first year (median = 73%, Fig.2).

Continuing professional development courses provide a useful incentive to gain new sentinel veterinarians.

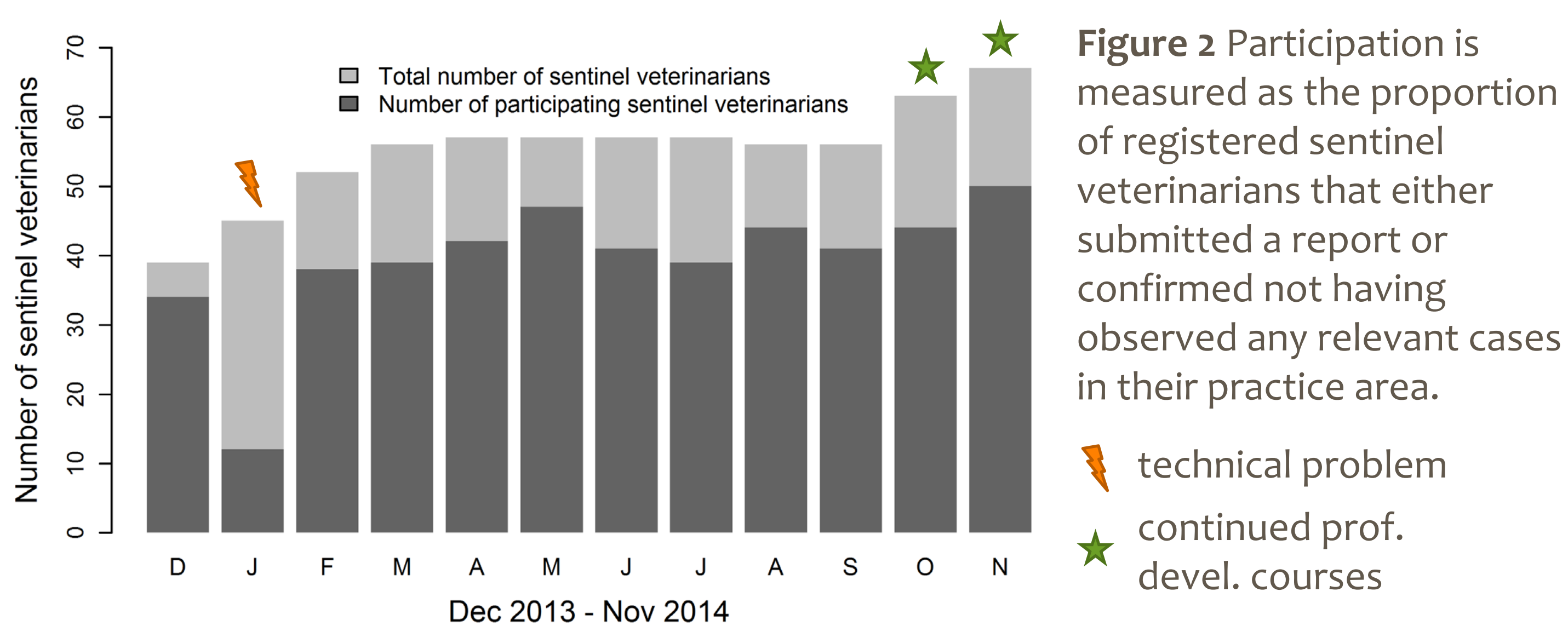


Figure 2 Participation is measured as the proportion of registered sentinel veterinarians that either submitted a report or confirmed not having observed any relevant cases in their practice area.

⚡ technical problem
★ continued prof. devel. courses

Receiving up-to-date information on the health status of the equine population was clearly stated to be motivating.

Barriers identified included an insufficient knowledge about what can be reported, concerns such as the uncontrollable dissemination of (false) information, or the perception of low relevance of the system.

Mobile reporting

Mobile devices were sporadically used for reporting during the first year (12.8% of reports).

Some veterinarians were not aware of the advantages of mobile reporting.

No common underlying problem or reason explaining the infrequent use of mobile devices was found.

Distributing a robust mobile device as incentive and promoting mobile reporting was challenging due to individual preferences on the type of mobile device or operating system.

Conclusions

- Non-monetary participation incentives can help attract and retain sentinel veterinarians.
- Veterinarians may require some time to become accustomed to novel reporting methods.
- Continued information feedback loops and sustained communication efforts with sentinel networks to promote better understanding of the system are needed.

Main interview outcomes



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