Abstract

In the Americas there are between 4,500 and 6,800 annual cases of severe visceral leishmaniasis, and mortality is estimated to range between 7 and 10%. However, underreporting and subclinical infections mask the real epidemiological importance of visceral leishmaniasis. Control efforts, which have typically focused on insecticide spraying of sand fly vectors and dog culling, have yielded disparate results. Nevertheless, thousands of dogs are sacrificed each year in countries endemic for visceral leishmaniasis. Additionally, current guidelines of leishmaniasis control programs have banned dog treatment with drugs of human use while therapy with other drugs resulted in high rates of relapses. Society requires that control programs take a more humanitarian approach aimed at limiting dog culling. There is an urgent need to promote responsible dog-ownership and support research on: a) novel veterinary therapies, b) low-cost molecular diagnosis of canine visceral leishmaniasis, and c) determination of dog infectivity threshold for proper reservoir management.

Keywords

Leishmaniasis, visceral/prevention & control; Leishmania infantum, dogs, therapy, Latin America.