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Do Para-Professionals Provide Quality Veterinary Services? Results from a Role Play Experiment in Rural Uganda

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Abstract

The study examines the interaction of farmers, veterinarians and paraprofessionals in the provision of clinical veterinary services. A role play experiment is used to analyse how the interaction of farmers and service providers influences the quality and the demand for clinical services. The game was played in four rounds, and the quality of clinical services was measured by scoring the accuracy of a service provider prescribing the appropriate drug for selected animal diseases in each round. Statistical tests were performed to establish whether the quality of services provided by different types of paraprofessionals and veterinarians differ. Learning curves for service providers were constructed to examine whether the quality of services provided by paraprofessionals improves as they continue to interact with veterinarians. Belief updating curves were constructed for farmers to examine whether they change their beliefs about paraprofessionals after receiving information about the quality of their services. A probit regression model for binary panel data was estimated to determine the factors that influence farmers' decisions to change service providers. The results show that the ability to identify the signs of different diseases and the accuracy of prescriptions by veterinarians is not significantly different from that of paraprofessionals trained in veterinary science. However, the ability of service providers who are not trained in veterinary medicine ability to perform these tasks is significantly lower than that of service providers trained in veterinary science. The continued interaction between paraprofessionals and veterinarians gradually leads to an improvement in the ability of paraprofessionals trained in general agriculture and social sciences to perform these tasks. This is not the case for paraprofessionals with no formal training or education. Farmers do not easily change their beliefs about paraprofessionals, even if they receive information on their lack of ability to diagnose diseases correctly and prescribe the correct drugs. Belief updating depends not only on the outcome of the previous round, but also on the gender of the farmer and the livestock production system. The paper argues that the slow pace in which farmers update their beliefs about paraprofessionals limits paraprofessional's willingness to learn or consult with veterinarians.

Keywords: Belief updating, lemon market, role play game, Uganda, veterinary services