

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

New York President Challenges the Empire State's Veterinarians

Editor's Note: *Linda J. M. Tintle, DVM, is 2013 president of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS). She is a bold and effective advocate for women's veterinary leadership. Tintle's comments below are among the best I have read on the subject, and she and the NYSVMS have kindly granted permission to reprint her President's Message in its entirety.*

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*Dr. Linda J.M. Tintle, President, New York State Veterinary Medical Society
(Photo provided by NYSVMS, 2012)*

By Dr. Linda J.M. Tintle (Guest Author)
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I can recall a carefully typed letter from my grandfather, the son of an immigrant grocer in Brooklyn, to my mother predicting the demise of the world he knew because of the expansion

of the “supermarket.” He described the supermarket as an impersonal place where one picked one’s own products from a bewildering array of stock. A place where there was no butcher who greeted you by name and slipped fresh slices of bologna to your eager child while you discussed what cuts of meat he might prepare for your purchase. A place where lowest price, not quality or value, was the primary determinant of purchase and, mark his words, would be a juggernaut that crushed the small business owners who had been both neighbors and pillars of support to their communities and society.

It had been 60 years since he wrote that letter and the record of his despair echoes as I ponder the future of veterinary practice. I know that change is inevitable but how do we make that change for the better.

As President of the NYSVMS, I was invited to administer the Veterinarian’s Oath to the Cornell Class of 2013. It was an honor to have the opportunity to speak that oath again, along with faces of such bright promise. I have great faith that veterinarians will always continue to live the principles espoused in our oath.

Today we are experiencing a period of professional sea change; with fewer new and recent graduates interested in practice ownership. Perhaps it is not as drastic a change as when the veterinary profession faced the replacement of horse with automobile in the last century, but this is a very different business today.

When I started out in veterinary medicine, I always assumed that I would be a practice owner, or at least full partner, in a group practice. My family has a long history of starting and owning small businesses and it never occurred to me to do otherwise. I paid out-of-state tuition for my college education and had no financial support from my parents after high school. My student debt was almost twice my starting salary, similar to, but not as severe as that commonly shouldered today. The factors that have contributed to the heavy debt load of recent graduates were the topic of journalist David Segal’s *New York Times* article “High Debt and Falling Demand Trap New Vets” earlier this year. With that lying out on the table, we need to examine what the NYSVMS can do to better strengthen the next generation of veterinarians, and our profession, for a strong, successful future.

I recently finished Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg’s bestselling book “Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead” in which she addresses business leadership and development and the consequences to society of women not having a seat at the table where decisions are made. I have also begun an on-going conversation with former Cornell Dean Donald Smith; Julie Kumble, Director of Grants and Programs at the Women’s Fund of Western Massachusetts; and a group of women who are veterinary students at Cornell about the challenges that face our newest veterinarians and the advantages of practice ownership. Sandberg’s experiences in the working world resonate with me, and her exhortation to change the conversation from focusing

on “can’t” to “what we can do” struck a perfect note at a time when I was considering how our association could expand the number of paths to success for young veterinarians.

As a longtime owner, I am concerned that we have made our young veterinarians too risk averse by the constant repetition of how they carry too much debt without providing maps or transferring the skills to navigate beyond those shoals. The paralysis of debt appears to be an example of Sandberg’s “can’t” when what we really need is a fresh approach to creating a brighter future.

The NYSVMS is planning programs to help prepare veterinarians to be ready to grab opportunities with both hands, whether those opportunities are in private practice, corporate management, government careers, professional organizations, community service or academic because our options are vast. Our Continuing Education committee, the Committee for Leadership Advancement and NYSVMS staff are working to develop leadership training programs for our members where they can acquire the skills, knowledge and self-assurance necessary for veterinary practice ownership and other paths to success. As Sandberg points out, “It’s a jungle gym not a ladder” and there are many difference ways to get where you want to go and enjoy the journey. The NYSVMS remains committed to supporting New York’s veterinarians in whatever road they’re taking.

Kumble and Sandberg both point out that experts recommend a minimum of 30 percent women in leadership positions for a sector to achieve the necessary critical mass to allow women’s roles to become part of the norm in that culture. We need to carefully examine how the NYSVMS can ensure that female veterinarians in New York are an integral part of our leadership and know that their interests are well-represented.

We are LEAPing¹ into creative ventures to help our members face today’s challenges and I look forward to sharing details as they come to fruition.

Best wishes,
Linda Tintle

¹ The mission statement of the NYSVMS incorporates LEAP in the following way (emphasis added):
“The New York State Veterinary Medical Society is poised to **lead** the veterinarians of New York State in **education**, **advancement**, and **protection** of animal well-being, public health and the practice of veterinary medicine.
“For nearly 125 years, the NYSVMS has been the resource for New York State’s veterinarians.”

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Women in Veterinary Medicine

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