

## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# AVMA 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Student Summit Symposium: Understanding our Past to Transform our Future

By Donald F. Smith

June 9, 2013

Those who attend the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary AVMA Convention in Chicago have a real treat in store for them on Saturday, July 20<sup>th</sup>. The AVMA initially planned the one-day symposium to feature a panel of distinguished veterinarians to present the most important accomplishments in their respective fields. However, it was ultimately determined that students should present the symposium, giving them the opportunity to research the profession's historical roots to discover the challenges and successes of the veterinary profession, and to present a vision for the future from the next generation of veterinarians.

So last fall, the AVMA launched a national student contest complete with generous scholarship opportunities provided by the American Veterinary Medical Foundation.<sup>1</sup> Students from all veterinary colleges in the US were invited to submit 300 word pre-proposals last December. After the initial review, full proposals of 7,000 words were requested by March 15. A team of six judges reviewed the proposals and the authors of eight winning entries were invited to Chicago to present their papers.

The title of the Summit at the AVMA meeting in Chicago, "Understanding our Past to Transform Our Future," speaks to the need to know the past in order to meet the challenges and opportunities that face us in the years to come.

The ten students who will be traveling to Chicago span all four classes, from 2016 to the recent 2013 graduates. Their presentations will cover the topics of equine, small animal (general and feline), and food animal practice, wildlife medicine, and academia.

The winning students and titles of their presentations are:

- **Shira Rubin**, Cornell: The History of Feline Medicine in America: Nine Lives and Counting (Companion Animal, Feline)
- **Cynthia Wise**, Wisconsin: Welfare and Production in Dairy Cattle Veterinary Practice (Food Animal)
- **Melissa Fenn** and **Nikhita Parandekar**, Cornell: Making Strides through History: A Look into the Past, Present, and Future of Equine Veterinary Medicine (Equine)

- **Mee-La Lee**, Wisconsin: The Past, Present and Future of Veterinary Medicine in Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (Wildlife)
- **Sarah Khatibzadeh**, Cornell: The Evolution of the Equine Surgery Specialty in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries (Equine)
- **Susan Blunck**, Wisconsin: Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (Wildlife)
- **Rebecca Donnelly** and **David Seader**, Cornell: The Past, Present and Future of Companion Animal Medicine (Companion Animal)
- **Danielle Lindquist**, North Carolina State: History of Veterinary Education and Academia (Academic)

Some of the students shared with me how the experience of researching and preparing the presentations gave them a new appreciation for the possibilities a career in veterinary medicine can offer.

Danielle Lindquist looked beyond her own education to discover what makes veterinary medicine such an outstanding career choice.



*Danielle Lindquist, North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine*  
(Photo by Danielle Lindquist)

*“From interviewing present and current deans, my anatomy professor and even fellow classmates, I learned that everyone has a different story to tell and every single person can make a difference in this profession. The experience has taught me that ordinary people accomplish extraordinary things and I hope to continue to inspire and be inspired by this profession, which continuously changes the world, one patient at a time.”*

What Mee-La Lee discovered with this project was that veterinary involvement with wildlife and ecosystem health is relatively new.

*"The field is broad and challenged by habitat loss, human-wildlife conflict, environment contamination and emerging disease. I was most inspired by my interviewees' willingness to provide mentorship as I explored a vision for the future and how I can contribute to the interdisciplinary nature of our field."*

Cynthia Wise researched and wrote about dairy cattle welfare, inspired by discussions that started in her Wisconsin ethics class.



*Cynthia Wise, University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine*  
(Photo by Cynthia Wise)

*"I hoped this project could be a way to learn more about animal welfare issues in dairies and how these ideas could be translated into dairy production settings practice on farms. It was inspiring to see the different ways that veterinarians are working within the dairy industry to move forward on welfare issues, from research and teaching to working with retailers and directly with producers on the farm. I gained a profound respect for the complexities of the animal welfare debate and how the dairy industry has changed over time and the challenges that lie in the future."*

First-year Cornell students Rebecca Donnelly and David Seader each have veterinarians in their family background. In their investigation of the history of small animal clinical practice they interviewed leaders in veterinary medicine in person or by telephone.



*Rebecca Donnelly and David Seader, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine*  
(Photo @ Cornell University)

*"With this project, we were fortunate enough to connect with fifteen of the most inspiring leaders both in and outside of the field of veterinary medicine. Each person was eager to speak with us, has stayed in contact, and will undoubtedly provide continued support into the future, which is invaluable for our professional development. In addition, by tracing the history of veterinary medicine through the experiences of its leaders, it has been incredible to see the patterns that emerge which shaped and continue to shape our profession today."*

Understanding the history of the profession is but a small aspect of this scholarship program. Preparing for the future and anticipating the changes that they will likely encounter is another. Perhaps the most important aspect of this exercise, however, is for the students to connect with leaders who can become mentors to the next generation of trailblazers in veterinary medicine.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Veterinary Medical Association very generously supports the travel and lodging expenses of these students.

**KEYWORDS:**

American Veterinary Medical Association  
American Veterinary Medical Foundation

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History of Veterinary Medicine  
150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the AVMA

Susan Blunck

Heather Case

Rebecca Donnelly

Melissa Fenn

Sarah Khatibzadeh

Mee-La Lee

Danielle Lindquist

Nikhita Parandekar

Shira Rubin

David Seader

Cynthia Wise

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Dr. Donald F. Smith, Dean Emeritus of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine, had a passion for the value of the history of veterinary medicine as a gateway for understanding the present and the future of the profession.

Throughout his many professional roles from professor of surgery, to Department Chair of Clinical Sciences, Associate Dean of Education and of Academic Programs and Dean, he spearheaded changes in curriculum, clinical services, diagnostic services and more. He was a diplomat of the American College of Veterinary Surgeons and a member of the National Academy of Practices. Most recently he played a major role in increasing the role of women in veterinary leadership.

*Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine* is one of his projects where he was able to share his vast knowledge of the profession.