

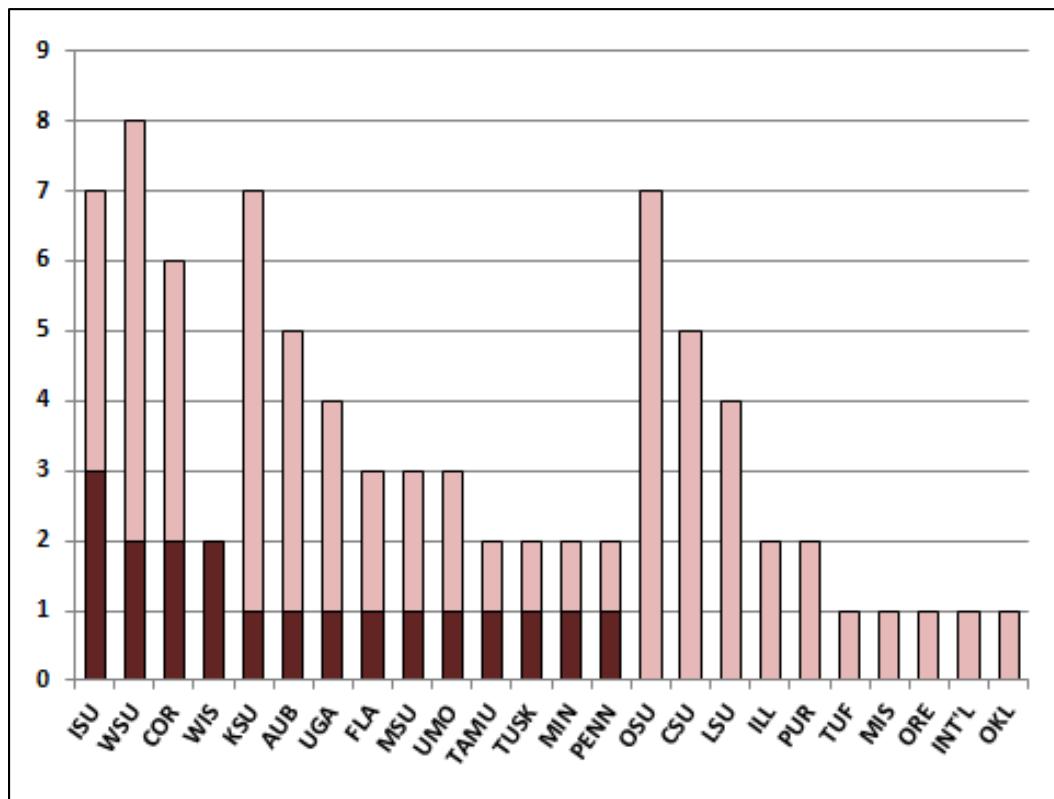
## Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

# AVMA Leadership by Gender and College of Graduation

By Dr. Donald F. Smith and Julie Kumble

November 7, 2013

The diversity of educational background of the voting members of the AVMA's Executive Board (EB) and House of Delegates (HOD) was described in the story posted here earlier this week.<sup>1</sup> We go a step further today, showing the gender profile of the leadership.



*Number of men and women (y-axis) from Colleges and Schools of Veterinary Medicine who are voting members of the AVMA's House of Delegates and Executive Board (2013-14). Dark color represents women, light color represents men.*

The graph above shows the number of women (dark colored bars) and men (light bars) who are voting members of the EB and HOD by college or school where they received their veterinary degree. Though none of the EB voting members are women, 17 of the HOD delegates are

female. This represents 21% of the total voting members of the combined leadership and is consistent with the results provided in a previous story on this site.<sup>2</sup>

Four colleges have more than one woman represented in the voting leadership, including Iowa State University which has three of their seven HOD delegates. They include a veterinarian in South Dakota who represents the American Association of Swine Practitioners, and another who is the delegate from Iowa. The other Iowa State University (ISU) alumna is the HOD delegate from Rhode Island, Dr. Courtney Rebensdorf, who owns a four-doctor practice in Cranston.

I asked Dr. Rebensdorf how a Midwestern graduate could attain such an important position in a state (Rhode Island) where only three percent of the veterinarians graduated from her college.<sup>3</sup>

*During my veterinary college years, I was heavily influenced by Dr. Ordella Geisler, the first woman practitioner in my home state of Nebraska.<sup>4</sup> She would tell me about her early days as a large animal practitioner and what it was like going out on farm calls. If a rancher would balk at the sight of a woman driving up to treat his livestock, Dr. Geisler would simply tell the man that she was the only veterinarian in the area and it was her or nobody. She would then go about doing what was needed in a competent manner and win over another convert. It was not easy in those days, and I realized I wanted to contribute to advancing the role of women in the profession when I graduated.*

*My first job was in Florida, where my boss encouraged me to become involved in organized veterinary medicine, and I moved up the ladder to become president of the Southwest Florida Veterinary Medical Association. After moving to Rhode Island to practice in 1991, I took it upon myself to get involved and later served as president of the state association. I became an alternate on the HOD in 2009 and progressed from there to delegate status.*

Dr. Rebensdorf was not surprised to see the high level of involvement of ISU graduates in the AVMA leadership. “*The importance of organized veterinary medicine was always impressed upon us in college. That influence, as well as the mentoring of Dr. Geisler, made me want to get involved.*”

The women graduates of Washington State University who are delegates of the HOD include the delegate from Idaho and the delegate representing the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners.



*Courtney Rebensdorf, DVM (ISU 1984)  
Owner, Oaklawn Animal Hospital, Cranston, RI.  
(Photo by the author, 2013)*

Despite being a relatively new institution, the University of Wisconsin-Madison has two delegates among its veterinary alumnae.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Kathy Reilly (Class of 1990) was a Massachusetts native who returned to New England to practice small animal medicine. She became a HOD delegate in 2004 and had intended to step down a couple of years ago but was urged to remain by Dr. Ann Sherwood Zieser, her classmate and former roommate.

At the time, Dr. Sherwood Zieser, a practitioner in Middleton, Wisconsin, was transitioning from HOD alternate to delegate.

*I wanted to continue to serve in the House with Kathy since I started as an alternate delegate in 2008. Kathy was very helpful in introducing me to people within the HOD to facilitate the relationships that foster the communication and cooperation that is so important in creating a productive environment in the House. We have even shared a room at several meetings to save on expenses.<sup>6</sup>*

Drs. Reilly and Sherwood Zieser, the only classmates who currently serve in the HOD, anticipate that they will complete their HOD responsibilities together at the Boston AVMA meeting in 2015.<sup>7</sup> Just as these two former roommates have encouraged each other to serve as HOD delegates, women who champion and push each other forward ultimately make some of the strongest leaders. As with the Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact,<sup>8</sup> a ten-month program for women, the strength of the cohorts and the synergy they form as a collective make an impact that goes well beyond the skills that each woman develops for herself. Drs. Reilly and Sherwood Zieser embody the adage that the mark of a truly good leader is one who promotes the leadership of others around her.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, Donald F. Diversity of Educational Background in the AVMA Leadership (2013-14). *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. November 5, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. Women's Leadership in the U.S. Congress and the AVMA's House of Delegates: Exploring Parallels and Looking Forward. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 28, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Rebensdorr, Courtney, DVM (veterinary practitioner in Cranston, Rhode Island). Telephone conversation and email communication with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 2013, Nov 6.

<sup>4</sup> Geisler, Ordella, DVM (Kansas State 1947), the first woman veterinarian to be licensed in the state of Nebraska. Dr. Geisler was a general practitioner during the early part of her career. After purchasing a veterinary clinic in 1972, she treated primarily small animals. [Kansas State University CVM recognition awards](#), 2006.

<sup>5</sup> The School had its first graduating class in 1987.

<sup>6</sup> Sherwood Zieser, Ann DVM (veterinary practitioner in Middleton, Wisconsin). E-mail communication with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 2013, November 5.

<sup>7</sup> Reilly, Kathy DVM (veterinary practitioner in southern New Hampshire). Telephone conversation with Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), 2013, November 5.

<sup>8</sup> [LIPPI \(Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact\)](#), Women's Fund for Western Massachusetts, Easthampton, Massachusetts.

#### KEYWORDS:

American Veterinary Medical Association

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Iowa State University

University of Wisconsin-Madison

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Dr. Ann Zeiser

Dr. Kathy Reilly

Dr. Courtney Rebensdorf

Dr. Ordella Geisler

Julie Kumble

Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts

Leadership Institute for Political and Public Impact

#### TOPIC:

Women in Veterinary Medicine

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS:

**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.

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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.

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