

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

New York Veterinarians: They're From Everywhere

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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During last weekend's presentation on Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine at the New York State Veterinary Conference,¹ the discussion gradually shifted to making connections with other veterinarians who can become mentors and advocates for women. As I surveyed the audience of about 40 people, I became acutely aware of the diversity within the room. Not so much racial and ethnic diversity, or age (though there was some of each), but of college of graduation.

Seated near the front were several Cornell graduates, including the AVMA's immediate past president and the current president of the New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS). But also in the room were graduates of several other colleges who held major leadership positions. They included a past NYSVMS president who had graduated from Colorado State University, another from Tuskegee, and an upcoming (2015) president-elect from University of Wisconsin-Madison.

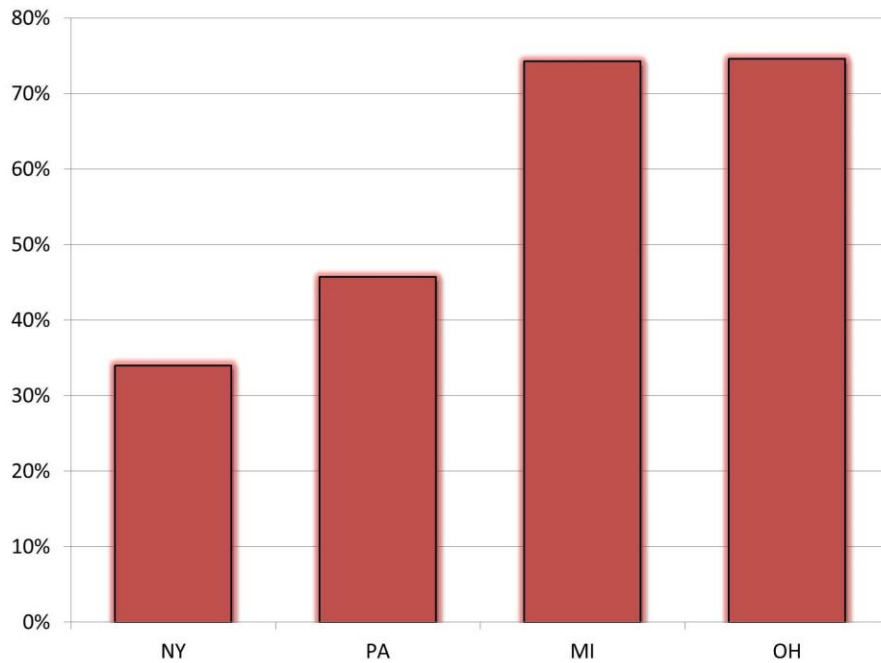
Because the session was about women's leadership, I was reminded of the educational background of the five women who have been State Society presidents: only one—the current president, Dr. Linda Tintle—is a Cornell graduate. The others had graduated from Colorado State University, Tuskegee University, University of Illinois, and the University of the Philippines Diliman.

New York has always been a melting pot for veterinarians who graduated from many colleges, not just from Cornell University. Between 1870 and 1900, many New York veterinarians attended Canadian colleges in Toronto or Montreal. Though Cornell's influence started to be felt in the 1890s, the colleges in New York City added significant numbers of veterinarians to the State until the last city college closed in 1922.

Just as veterinarians from colleges outside New York have populated the state, Cornell has also been a net exporter of veterinary graduates. Daniel Salmon, the first DVM, worked in Washington and later in South America. Half of the class of 1939, a cohort of 40 graduates for which we have acquired a great deal of historical information, worked outside the state.

With almost each passing decade of the last half of the 20th century, a greater percentage of graduates left the state and were replaced by those from other colleges. In the 1970s, many incoming veterinarians were from European colleges (especially Italian and Philippine colleges). Almost 600 veterinarians who were educated in the Caribbean have entered New York State in the last 30 years and they now comprise over 14% of the total number of veterinarians.

The following graph compares the percentage of AVMA-member Cornell graduates in New York State to the percent of University of Pennsylvania graduates in Pennsylvania, and similarly for Ohio State and Michigan State Universities in Ohio and Michigan, respectively.



Percentage of AVMA members in NY, PA, MI and OH who are graduates of the in-state veterinary college

The veterinary workforce of neighboring Midwestern states like Ohio and Michigan are largely built upon alumni from the in-state colleges. In contrast, New York and to a lesser extent, Pennsylvania, have always welcomed veterinarians from colleges outside their borders while their graduates have often sought employment elsewhere.

With respect to the New York State Veterinary Conference last weekend, the fact that attendees (mostly current New York residents) were alumni from a multitude of colleges made for a rich learning experience for presenters and attendees alike. It also makes it easier for young veterinarians to find mentors and advocates from different educational backgrounds.

Personally, I like that.

¹ Kumble, Julie and Smith, Donald. Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine, presented at the New York State Veterinary Conference, Ithaca, NY. Oct 6, 2013.

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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.