

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

Three Unfolding Stories for 2014

By Dr. Donald F. Smith*

January 7, 2014

The following stories of high impact to the veterinary profession carry over from 2013. I'll be watching their progress closely, and encourage you to do the same. Whether it be through this site, through sources identified in the footnotes below, or through direct connections with organizations representing the veterinary profession, these are issues that warrant our close attention and ongoing dialogue.

The New York Times Article on Return on Investment for a Veterinary Education.

The juxtaposition of student debt and veterinary compensation, so prominent in 2013, persists as a vexing problem as we enter the New Year. The best evidence of this in the public sphere is the continued reference to the explosive article in the New York Times last February.¹ Though the article (including numerous errors that had to be corrected a week later) may not quite have fallen to the level of yellow journalism, Segal's careless reporting of data, coupled with the expert testimony he chose to quote, was reminiscent of Alexandre Liautard's ranting about the ills of veterinary medicine in the early 20th century. The Times did little to advance thoughtful discourse of the issue and created widespread mischief in the process.

The sustainability of return on investment for educational debt is a serious and complex issue, deserving of a more adroit platform for discussion. As quoted in the Times article, Dr. Douglas A. Aspros, past-president of the AVMA, succinctly captures the issue. "It's not a sustainable model," he says of vet school economics. "For the long-term success and health of the veterinary practice, we've got to look at every end of it."²

The Proposed End of Foreign Veterinary College Accreditation.

By this time next week, New York State Veterinary Medical Society's resolution to the AVMA's House of Delegates will have been deliberated and possibly voted upon.³ At issue is whether the Council on Education will limit future accreditation only to colleges and schools of veterinary medicine that operate or plan to operate within the US (currently numbering 30) and Canada (currently numbering 5). Accreditation would not be available to foreign colleges and schools.

It would be most helpful if discussion of foreign veterinary college accreditation—which has wisely, I believe, expanded in the last decade—could avoid the sophistry of the Council on Education's work flow, putative language barriers, and other peripheral issues. Arguments should deal directly with fundamental issues. Those are maintaining the standards of

accreditation both domestically and internationally; and responding fairly and legally to concerns surrounding regulation of access to veterinary education in a global environment affecting both animal and human health.

The greatest failing in the present debate over restricting accreditation is an issue outside the scope of current arguments: how to grow the market for veterinary services through expansion of the role of veterinarians in promoting human health in this country and worldwide.

On a personal note, and as a foreign DVM graduate myself, I shall always be grateful to then-dean Dr. Robert Marshak, who created an institutional environment whereby graduates of colleges outside the US were included in the roster of candidates for house staff positions at the University of Pennsylvania. In my intern year (1974-75), five of the six large animal interns at New Bolton Center were graduates of foreign veterinary colleges. Two of us remained in the US and eventually attained positions of leadership in academia. This is not novel as almost 16% of the deans of US colleges over the past three decades are graduates of foreign veterinary colleges.⁴

Advancing Women in Veterinary Leadership.

In late July 2013, just days after the AVMA finished its 150th anniversary meeting in Chicago, I predicted on this site that, "At the AVMA meeting in Denver (July 2014), I believe we will look back on the sesquicentennial's Five Days in July as defining the strategy and mobilizing the membership toward a new era in women's leadership in organized veterinary medicine."⁵

I may actually have understated the progress we could see by July 2014. With the establishment of the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative (WVLDI) led by Drs. Karen Bradley, Stacy Pritt and others, interested and engaged women and men have established a significant veterinary grassroots presence that "seeks to bridge the gender gap in the leadership of the veterinary profession."⁶

The conversation is not restricted to the AVMA and other types of organized veterinary medicine, but also includes clinical practice, academia, and industry. Dr. Eleanor Green, dean at Texas A&M and a director of the WVLDI, is one of the strongest proponents for meaningful enhancement of diversity of leadership in the profession. "Because veterinary medicine and its organizations are reflections of its members and leaders, the future of the profession depends upon the development of talented leaders in an engaging environment of inclusiveness."⁷

Presentations in support of women's leadership have been made at the New York State Veterinary Conference and Iowa State University, and programs are scheduled for the North American Veterinary Conference (January) and the Western Veterinary Conference (February). An experimental one-day distribution (elective) course at Cornell University is scheduled for March 1st. Other presentations are planned for the AVMA's Veterinary Leadership Conference

this weekend, the Student AVMA symposium in March, and at this year's AVMA meeting in Denver.

The three concerns outlined in this posting represent that old-fashioned concept of *antinomy*, a contradiction between two beliefs or conclusions that are in themselves reasonable. If we can engage in a climate of open, civil, and creative discussion of challenging issues, including topics of the magnitude these three carry, the future for veterinary medicine is bright.

** Dr. Smith served as dean of veterinary medicine at Cornell (1997-2007). During the first six years of his dean term, he was a member of the AVMA's Council on Education. Smith chaired the Veterinary Admissions Committee at Cornell University (2010-13). He is a director of the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative, and serves on the Board of Ross University (Medicine and Veterinary Medicine), and Midwestern University.*

¹ Segal, David. "[High Debt and Falling Demand Trap New Vets](#)" *New York Times*, Feb 23, 2013 (corrected version Mar 3).

² Ibid

³ JAVMA news [Proposal would cease accreditation of foreign schools](#). *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, Dec 15, 2013.

⁴ Smith, Donald F. Education of a Dean. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 7, 2013. Since this article was posted last July, Cyril R. Clarke, graduate of the University of Pretoria in South Africa, was appointed to replace Gerhard G. Schurig (graduate of Universidad De Chile) as dean of Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

⁵ Smith, Donald F. Five Days in July: Catalyzing a New Wave of Women's Leadership in the AVMA. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 29, 2013.

⁶ JAVMA news. [AVMA collaborating with women's initiative](#). *J Am Vet Med Assoc*, Jan 15, 2014.

⁷ Green, Eleanor M., DVM Auburn 1973 (Carl B. Dean of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences at Texas A&M University). Email to Donald F. Smith, Jan 3, 2014.

KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine
Veterinary Education
Student Debt
New York Times
David Segal
Alexandre Liautard
Douglas Aspros
Accreditation
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Robert Marshak
University of Pennsylvania
Foreign-educated veterinarians
House of Delegates

Women in Veterinary Medicine
Women Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative
Karen Bradley
Stacy Pritt
Eleanor Green

TOPICS:

Veterinary Accreditation
Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

What are some of the biggest challenges to veterinary medicine in 2014?

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.