

AVMA Presidential Candidates Discuss Governance, Future Scope of the Profession, and Advocacy

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
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On June 18, the website of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA news) posted an interview with the two candidates for president-elect of the AVMA.¹ Drs. Larry G. Dee and Joseph H. Kinnarney are running for the position that will be decided by the House of Delegates (HOD) July 25th preceding the annual convention in Denver.

After reading the responses to the interviewer's questions, I decided to invite the two candidates to expand on specific subjects that I thought may be of interest to readers of this site. Both candidates agreed and their written responses follow. I am grateful to both individuals for participating in this request for comment, and to AVMA Senior News Editor, Susan C. Kohler, for her support.²

Regarding Length of Terms in Office:

You have a combined 27 years of service in the House of Delegates (HOD). Admittedly that was a different era when service and time commitment were often measured by longevity, but even during those decades some may have felt it excessive to have such a long period of service. How do you explain this when you both advocate for more active engagement from the membership?

Dr. Larry G. Dee:

The short answer to the question is that we represented our associations in an acceptable, appropriate, and perhaps, exemplary fashion that encouraged our reelection to additional terms in the HOD. When I first entered the HOD 20 years ago, the typical delegate had demonstrated years of service to their association, often as president of that association. Longevity of service in the House allowed a better understanding of AVMA process, and allowed the development of relationships between members. These factors must be compared to the value of increasing opportunities for new representation with its implied increase in activity, vigor, and enthusiasm, as well as increased representation of younger members of the Association.

While I was in the House, the FVMA elected the alternate delegate to a four-year term, automatically becoming delegate for an additional four years. In the absence of a superior candidate for the position, I was reelected alternate delegate at the end of my term as delegate. During my tenure in the House, I was able to introduce resolutions that resulted in

the current State Advocacy Committee, and the AVMA position on standardization of microchips. In addition, through debate on the House floor, I was able to convince the House to refer to the Animal Welfare Committee a resolution which had been approved by the Executive Board, the HAC, and the reference committee, that, if passed, would have embarrassed the Association and the profession.

My terms in the House were frustrated by my inability to identify Florida veterinarians who would run for the various councils and committees, a frustration that continues. I believe the goal for the HOD should be to have delegates in the House who actively address the challenges of our profession and are willing to act as catalysts for change. I do not believe that longevity, in itself, is completely good or bad, nor do I believe that youth and inexperience, in themselves, should be gatekeepers for service.

Whether the changes in governance structure are approved or not, I believe they have invigorated the House to have a more active role in leading the Association.

Dr. Joseph H. Kinnarney:

I was fortunate to be a young leader in AVMA. At 35, I was elected alternate delegate to AVMA. At 45 I was elected AVMA Vice President and then went back in the HOD as delegate. While I agree it is important to involve younger members in leadership positions, we must also have a governance structure that allows advancement of more seasoned members.

Regarding Women's Leadership in the AVMA:

In your combined reports, there is only one oblique mention of gender and that is in reference to "the nonpractice obligations of many women veterinarians."³ How would your appointment as president create opportunities for women's leadership in the profession? More specifically, how would you propose helping to close the leadership gap in the AVMA?

Dr. Dee:

Ask them to serve. Offer expanded leadership training, like the Veterinary Leadership Conference to younger members of the profession. Clearly state that you have expectations that the women and men entering the profession will serve in leadership capacities. Understand the economic challenges of recent graduates and define leadership opportunities in time and economic costs so that they are attainable by this generation.

The Association is continuing to add places on various councils and committees for student representation and could expand this to include other young representatives. We may find that stipends may be required for some positions, such as the Executive Board, because of the costs incurred in time and money when serving in this capacity.

Dr. Kinnarney:

Gender issues in our profession need to be addressed as well as the make-up of our profession. Do we reflect the society we serve? No. Does our leadership reflect the

membership? No. AVMA must address both of these issues. During the last 10 years both state association leadership and HOD Makeup has become more balanced. However, at the AVMA Officer and Executive Board level there have not been enough female members. We, as the current leaders must look at those positions and ask why there is this imbalance. Then work to make effective changes. With the current schedule of Board members, it eliminates over 99% of our members from seeking these positions. We must look at how the Board functions and make it doable for more of our members to seek these positions.

Regarding the Future Scope of the Profession:

One of you is quoted in JAVMA, "A hundred years ago, I am sure veterinarians thought the profession was over when cars replaced the horse and mule. Instead, we grew and adapted to the changing needs of the American public."⁴ Yes, many thought the profession was in crisis when the remainder of our city colleges closed in the 1920s and the veterinary colleges retreated to the country where we clung to the land grant priority. A few of our leaders adopted public health priorities, but the majority of us learned how to treat cows and pigs and chickens, and a few farm horses. We left behind cities largely devoid of veterinarians interested in caring for the growing small animal population and we left the medical profession without the benefit of as many colleagues interested in comparative medicine.

We now live in a world where animals are considered to be an important contributor to human health, even one of the factors that could help slow the escalating cost of medical care. How do you think the AVMA could have a role in helping the veterinary profession develop a 21st century partnership with human medicine, one that we began to have a century ago when some of our veterinary colleges were aligned with major medical schools like Harvard, New York University, Columbia, and George Washington University? On the topic of pet health care, do you also think we have the capacity to expand the role of the academic veterinary community in the major urban areas of the country?

Dr. Dee:

These multiple issues are challenging. I think the primary gatekeeper in the One Health Initiative is the human medical profession. We must through advocacy and legislation expand our roles in this arena. Much of this challenge is economically driven. To expand our role in One Health I would consider supporting and expanding the National Academies of Practice in Veterinary Medicine by increasing the number of nominated individuals and giving financial and staff support to their initiatives. Expanding the financial support of veterinarians working in basic science and public health would be an initial step in improving our standing in the eyes of the human medical community.

“Expanding the role of the academic veterinary community in the major urban areas” is unclear. If you mean having “the capacity to open university administered or owned clinical facilities in urban areas,” while we may have the capacity, it would be opposed by most AVMA members in private practice. It would be seen as a non-profit competing against tax-paying small business. I believe there are an adequate number of specialty practices in

urban areas to serve the needs of the public. One could consider these specialty practices as representing “the academic veterinary community.”

Dr. Kinnarney:

The AVMA president has been the spokesperson for the association, but to our members and other veterinary associations. It is the time for our president to go to the public and profess the value of a veterinarian not only in terms of clinical practice, but public health, food safety, research, bio-security and human animal bond. The association must be considered the premier expert in these areas.

Regarding Advocacy for the Profession:

You both talk about communication and advocacy. If you had 30 minutes one-on-one with each of three prominent people (of any profession or position) to discuss one issue of the veterinary profession, who would they be and what issue would you address with each person?

Dr. Dee:

- President Obama: Veterinary medicine in biological terrorism events
- Head of FEMA: Veterinary resources and natural disasters
- Head of Parks and Wildlife Service: Feral horses

Dr. Kinnarney:

- Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education: How to address the debt to income problem facing veterinary medicine.
- Dr. Margaret Chan, Director Of WHO: The importance of Veterinary Medicine in protecting the health of the world.
- Warren Buffet: How to get the economics of the profession back on track.

On behalf of all of the readers of www.veritasdvmblog.com, I extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to both Dr. Dee and Dr. Kinnarney.

¹ Nolen, R. Scott (interviews). “[AVMA presidential candidates, in their own words. Dee, Kinnarney lay out their visions for the profession and AVMA](#),” *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. July 1, 2014. 245(1):16-19.

² Kahler, Susan C. (AVMA Senior News Editor), email to Donald F. Smith (Cornell University), July 1, 2014.

³ Nolen, “[AVMA presidential candidates, in their own words](#).”

⁴ Ibid.

KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine
American Veterinary Medical Association
House of Delegates
One Health

Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine
President AVMA
Joseph H. Kinnarney
Larry G. Dee

TOPIC:

Organized Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

How well do you know the two candidates running for AVMA President?

META-SUMMARY:

The two AVMA president candidates respond to questions about governance, women's leadership and advocacy.

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.