

Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative Directors Meet at the 2014 Denver AVMA, Part I

Editor's Note: The Women's Veterinary Leadership Development initiative (WVLDI) was an idea hatched at the 2013 Convention when Dr. Karen Bradley lost her re-election for Chair of the House Advisory Committee of the House of Delegates, returning the Committee to all-male composition. Shortly afterwards, she and two colleagues sat over lunch and outlined the concept of an initiative to advance women into leadership positions in the veterinary profession. She invited others to join the nascent group, including the AVMA's Immediate Past President, and a current and former dean. A more detailed history was described here in a July 23, 2014.¹

A year later, WVLDI debuted formally at its first AVMA convention. Here are some of the highlights as described by Julie Kumble, one of the inaugural directors of the organization. Part 2 of this article² will be posted tomorrow.

Donald F. Smith

By Julie Kumble (Guest Author)

September 1, 2014

Imagine nine people who never meet in person as a group. They engage during the year through a few conference calls and share emails, but only a few of them have actually met. They're unified, however, by an idea, a commitment to women's leadership in veterinary medicine. Imagine that after a year, they meet and make their commitment a reality. That's what happened at this year's 2014 AVMA Convention. The founding board members of the WVLDI kicked off their one-year anniversary with a full weekend of activities: A four-hour workshop by two of the members. Nine hours dedicated to strategic planning. A "hot topics" session. A half-day symposium with all board members before an audience. A meet and greet session.

The weekend started with a four-hour fee-based preconvention workshop, *Develop Practical Skills for Becoming Confident and Effective Leaders*,³ which drew the most participants of any workshop at the convention.⁴ Seeing such a strong turnout was exciting, and we were impressed by the mix of participants that included students, mid-career and more experienced veterinarians from across the profession. The four 50-minute sessions made for a long afternoon, but the energy grew each hour as participants considered ways to advance their own leadership as well as shared experiences and recommendations with others.

The workshop illuminated the leadership gender gap at all the major areas of the profession including organized veterinary medicine, practice, academia and industry. After exposing and discussing the problem, participants explored practical skills for identifying their desired areas of professional growth and seeking mentors to help them move forward. They also examined assumptions around the hot topic of negotiation as a tool for career advancement, and considered all perspectives—employer, potential employee and others—in the negotiation framework. The workshop also provided case studies on effective models for change.



Women's Leadership Workshop Participants
(Photo by Dr. Donald Smith, 2014)

Two Cornell students, Rebecca Donnelly and Michelle Forella,⁵ presented a case study of how they not only launched the first student WVLDI group but how they're sharing their knowledge and tips to the many other student chapters springing up around the country.

Colorado State University student Sarah Therio, who will be spearheading a student WVLDI chapter at her university this fall, felt that she built her knowledge base on the issue.⁶

The workshop was as informative as it was inspiring. Regardless of your notions about gender issues, it is a fact that across many professions, especially veterinary medicine, the leadership does not reflect the population. WVLDI is not about placing women in positions simply because of their gender. Rather, the mission is to support women who are well suited for leadership positions but who might not

otherwise run due to a variety of barriers--both inherent to the gender and present within social and political constructs. Placing these highly capable women in these positions is the right thing to do and helps provide the diversity needed for progress.

On the other side of the career track, Associate Professor Diane McClure, shared a different perspective.⁷

When I began in physiology the American Physiology Society (APS) had one woman for every 400 men. I had great mentors and women role models at UC Davis although I didn't realize how unusual that was until I left there. In the late 80's Dr. Barbara Horwitz lead an organized movement in the APS to support "Women in Physiology." This included a Women's Mentoring program. It was such a success that it wasn't long before men were clamoring to join in, "We want mentoring too." Eventually, the program became a "Mentoring Program."

As someone who is farther along in my career, it's important for me to stand up and make a way for other women. I'm here in this workshop because I have a daughter is who is 29 years old. While I tolerated it for myself, I am not going to tolerate it for her.

A silence fell over the room, until one woman said, "I'm 29. Thank you."

The directors of the WVLDI are:

- Douglas G. Aspros, DVM (COR '75), Small animal practitioner and practice owner, White Plains, NY, Past president, AVMA. Secretary-Treasurer WVLDI
- Karen Bradley, DVM (UGA '96), HOD Delegate (VT), Small animal Practitioner and practice co-owner, Montpelier, VT. President WVLDI
- Rachel Cezar, DVM (MSU '02), Horse Protection Coordinator, USDA/APHIS Animal Care, Riverdale, MD
- Eleanor M. Green, DVM (AUB '73), DACVIM, DABVP. Carl B. King Dean of Veterinary Medicine, Texas A&M University
- Bridget Heilsberg, DVM (CSU '13), Equine Practitioner, Whitesboro, TX
- Julie Kumble, MEd, Director of Leadership; Institute for Political and Public Impact, Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts, Leverett, MA
- Stacy Pritt, DVM (WSU '97), MS, MBA, CPIA, DACAW, Director IACUC, UT Southwestern Medical Center and HOD Delegate. Vice-President WVLDI
- Valerie E. Ragan, DVM (UGA '83), Director, Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine, Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine
- Elizabeth Sabin, DVM (UCD '92), PhD, Associate Director for International and Diversity Initiatives, AVMA
- Donald F. Smith, DVM (ONT '74), DACVS. Professor of Surgery and Dean, emeritus, Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine
- Cassandra Tansey, DVM candidate (TAMU '15), SAVMA president

- Lori M. Teller, DVM (TAMU '90), DABVP, HOD Alternate (TX), Small animal practitioner, Houston TX

¹ Smith, Donald F. WVLDI Marks its First Anniversary with Programs at the AVMA Convention in Denver. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, July 23, 2014.

² Kumble, Julie. WVLDI Directors Meet at the AVMA, Part 2. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, September 2, 2014.

³ The workshop was co-led by the author and Dr. Donald Smith.

⁴ Pritt, Stacy (Director IACUC, UT Southwestern Medical Center). Email to Julie Kumble (Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts) and Donald Smith (Cornell University), August 7, 2014.

⁵ Donnelly, Rebecca (DVM candidate 2016) and Michelle Forella (DVM candidate 2017), Cornell University.

⁶ Therio, Sarah (Colorado State University DVM student, Class of 2016 and President, Student Chapter of AMVA). Email to Julie Kumble (Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts), August 14, 2014.

⁷ McClure, Diane (Associate Professor, Western University of the Health Sciences). Email to Julie Kumble (Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts) and Donald Smith (Cornell University), August 14, 2014.

KEYWORDS

Womens' Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative

Women in Veterinary Medicine

Women's Leadership

Karen Bradley, DVM

Stacy Pritt, DVM

Douglas G. Aspros, DVM

Rachel Cezar, DVM

Eleanor M. Green, DVM

Bridget Heilsberg, DVM

Julie Kumble, MEd

Valerie E. Ragan, DVM

Elizabeth Sabin, DVM

Donald F. Smith, DVM

Cassandra Tamsey, DVM

Lori M. Teller, DVM Sarah Therio

Diane McClure

AVMA Convention

TOPIC:

Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative

Women in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

How were WVLDI directors involved in the AVMA meeting?

META-SUMMARY:

A WVLDI board member describes some of the women's leadership events at the recent AVMA Convention.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Julie Kumble is Director of Grants and Strategic Initiatives, Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts.