

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

AVMA Presidents of the 21st Century

By Dr. Donald W. Smith

July 16, 2014

The AVMA convention is almost upon us, and with it, the selection of the president-elect who will assume the presidency for 2015-16.¹ The decision will be made by the House of Delegates (HOD) immediately prior to the convention.

The typical profile of the fifteen 21st century presidents is a 60-something male small animal practice owner who graduated from veterinary college 35-40 years before their installation. Only one president was elected from a career outside of private clinical practice (Bonnie Beaver, academia), and her specialty is behavior, a subset of medicine.² Though a few of the recent presidents have had experience in mixed animal practice, none came from a primarily or exclusively food animal or equine practice.

The breadth of educational background of our 21st century presidents has been remarkable. They are graduates of 11 different veterinary colleges. What is even more impressive is that the states in which they reside have been equally distributed from the five regions of the country, with three each from the West, Midwest, Southwest, Southeast, and Northeast.

In a previous article, I mentioned this aspect of our diversity and contrasted it to some branches of our government.³ Consider the justices on the current Supreme Court, for example, where eight of the nine are graduates of just two law schools.⁴ Or what about the four most recent US presidents whom are all Ivy League graduates, with two⁵ having obtained law degrees from the same colleges as the Supreme Court justices.

In terms of AVMA leadership experience before election to the presidency, most have arisen from the Executive Board (EB), with many serving as chair or vice chair. Drs James Brandt and Joe Howell served as chair of the EB while they were Immediate Past Presidents. Several presidents also served on the HOD for a number of years before ascending to the Board. In 2002, Dr. Jack Walther became the first person in many decades to be elected president-elect from the position of vice president, a position which is primarily dedicated to student interactions.⁶

I acknowledge the desirability to have experienced and well-prepared veterinarians in the office of the president. However, I sometimes wonder if we could find a way to elect qualified AVMA presidents with fewer than 30 years of experience—the average length since 2000 is 36.8 years—since receiving their veterinary degrees. I recognize there are financial, professional

development, and work-life balance issues, but perhaps we could develop creative organizational strategies that open the process to a larger pool of potential candidates.

Regardless of how we strive to optimally represent the entirety of our profession, let's make sure we do not lose some of the desirable features of our current situation. Geographic and educational diversity are two positive components of our presidential profile. I, for one, think those are important items of note and that they could, in a quiet way, even serve as an exemplar for our judicial and executive branches of government.

Following is a list of the first 15 AVMA presidents of the 21st Century.

| Name | Term | State | College | AVMA Leadership ⁷ |
|----------------|---------|--------------|----------|------------------------------|
| Theodore Cohn | 2014-15 | Colorado | TUSK '75 | EB(CH), HOD |
| Clark Fobian | 2013-14 | Missouri | UMO '77 | EB |
| Douglas Aspros | 2012-13 | New York | COR '75 | EB(VC), COE |
| Rene Carlson | 2011-12 | Wisconsin | MINN '78 | VP, HOD, COE |
| Larry Kornegay | 2010-11 | Texas | TAMU '71 | EB(VC) |
| Larry Corry | 2009-10 | Georgia | UGA '66 | EB(CH), HOD |
| James Cook | 2008-09 | Kentucky | AUB '76 | EB(VC), HOD |
| Greg Hammer | 2007-08 | Delaware | KSU '73 | EB(VC), HOD |
| Roger Mahr | 2006-07 | Illinois | ISU '71 | EB(CH) |
| Henry Childers | 2005-06 | Rhode Island | AUB '54 | EB |
| Bonnie Beaver | 2004-05 | Texas | MINN '68 | EB(CH) ⁸ |
| Jack Walther | 2003-04 | Nevada | UCD '63 | VP, HOD |
| Joe Howell | 2002-03 | Oklahoma | OKL '72 | EB(CH) ⁹ |
| James Brandt | 2001-02 | Florida | OKL '64 | EB(CH) ¹⁰ , HOD |
| James Nave | 2000-01 | Nevada | UMO '68 | EB(CH), HOD |

AVMA Presidents from 2000-01 to 2014-15, including their college and year of DVM graduation. Under AVMA leadership experience, I restricted those responsibilities cited to Executive Board (EB) including Chair (CH) and Vice Chair (VC), Vice President (VP), House of Delegates (HOD), and Council on Education (COE).

(Table prepared by the author, 2014)¹¹

Though many of our presidents-elect are selected without a challenger, we will once again this year have a contested election for the person to serve as president in 2015-16. The two candidates are Dr. Larry Dee (Florida) and Dr. Joe Kinnarney (North Carolina).¹²

¹ The president-elect and also the vice president will be selected by the House of Delegates immediately preceding the AVMA annual convention in Denver on July 25, 2014.

² Dr. Henry Childers, president 2005-06, was appointed as assistant clinical professor in the School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University, however his primary professional focus was clinical practice.

³ Smith, Donald F. The Changing Face of AVMA Presidents Through the Years. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. May 21, 2013.

⁴ Harvard and Yale. Justice Ginsberg is a graduate of Columbia Law School. Six of the current nine justices also have undergraduate degrees from Ivy League universities.

⁵ Presidents Obama and Clinton.

⁶ More recently (2010), Dr. Rene Carlson, who had served as vice president, was elected to president-elect.

⁷ EB = Executive Board; CH = Chair; VC = Vice chair; HOD = House of Delegates; COE = Council on Education.

⁸ During the same meeting in which Dr. Beaver was elected chair of the Executive Board in a contested race, another woman, Dr. Joan Samuels, was elected vice-chair. That race was uncontested.

⁹ Dr. Howell became chair of the Executive Board following his presidency.

¹⁰ Dr. Brandt also became chair of the Executive Board following his presidency.

¹¹ The author acknowledges the assistance of several former AVMA presidents in preparation of this table.

¹² Smith, Donald F. AVMA Presidential Candidates Discuss Governance, Future Scope of the Profession, and Advocacy. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*, July 7, 2014.

KEYWORDS:

History of Veterinary Medicine
American Veterinary Medical Association
Diversity Women in Veterinary Medicine
James Nave
James Brandt
Joe Howell
Jack Walther
Bonnie Beaver
Henry Childers
Douglas Aspros
Theodore Cohn
Clark Fobian
Larry Corry
James Cook
Larry Kornegay
Rene Carlson
Greg Hammer
Roger Mahr
House of Delegates
Executive Board

TOPIC:

Organized Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

In what ways the 21st century AVMA presidents more diverse that the Supreme Court justices?

META-SUMMARY:

A demographic summary of the last 15 presidents of the AVMA.

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.