

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

WVLDI Marks its First Anniversary with Programs at the AVMA Convention in Denver

By Dr. Donald F. Smith
July 23, 2014

Sometimes change happens quickly. Occasionally, important things happen very quickly.

And that's the case with WVLDI—the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative—often simply called “Wivaldi” (like the classical composer, Vivaldi, but with a “W”).

Here's the story.

At last year's AVMA meeting in Chicago, Dr. Karen Bradley stood for re-election for the position of chair of the House Advisory Council (HAC) of the AVMA's House of Delegates (HOD). When the voting was completed, not only was she replaced by a man as chair, but male HOD delegates were selected to fill the three open seats on the seven-person HAC. As I wrote last year on this site, “Five Days in July,”

The stunning outcome reverberated across the floor and spilled out into the halls as the seven-member House Advisory Committee returned to being all male, having had only two women members in its history.¹

Many people, men as well as women, were disappointed. AVMA president, Dr. Douglas Aspros shared an observation that would prove prescient. “A historic convention,” he said, referring to the fact that it was the Association's sesquicentennial, “but bad outcomes for the HOD and great grist for the mill as we advocate for change.”²

Shortly after the meeting ended, Karen Bradley sat at lunch. Composed, self-assured, and even smiling at times, she conferred with colleagues, considering how women could improve their leadership platform in an association where everyone seemed to acknowledge the desirability to have more women engaged, but no one seemed to know how it could be accomplished.

The interest in developing a group to support women's leadership grew during the day. Dr. Stacy Pritt, who would become Vice President of the future WVLDI, described the momentum as “palpable, with people rapidly signing up to join a Facebook initiative, and plans for a web site and logo were being solidified.” Under her leadership, those plans came to fruition within just a few short weeks after the convention.³



Dr. Karen Bradley, President WVLDI
(Photo provided by Dr. Bradley, 2013)

Less than two months later (September 11), Dr. Bradley hosted a conference call that included six women and two men. Three, including herself, are members of the HOD, and two were past presidents of the AVMA. There was one dean, and one dean emeritus. There was also a faculty member from a veterinary college, and a representative from a women's foundation in Massachusetts. These nine agreed to become the founding directors of WVLDI, with Dr. Bradley agreeing to serve as the inaugural president.⁴

Almost immediately, WVLDI established Facebook and LinkedIn pages that energized grass roots discussions among its members. Lectures and seminars were presented at the North American Veterinary Conference in January and the Western Veterinary Conference a month later. A presentation given at the Denver student symposium in mid-March ignited student interest that had been kindled at a course in Women's Leadership held at Cornell two weeks earlier.⁵ Student chapters of WVLDI were quickly established at three colleges,⁶ and a news article on that topic appeared in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.⁷

Several aspiring female leaders have benefited already from the WVLDI's mentorship and sponsorship. They are participating in AVMA-sponsored leadership development programs and serve on AVMA committees.

In February, financial support and sponsorship was received from Ceva Animal Health, LLC, an international animal health care company. In announcing her support for WVLDI, Dr. Karen Padgett, Ceva's chief operations officer, companion animal (US), said, "We recognize how important it is to support the advancement of women to leadership, policy and decision-making positions within all areas of professional veterinary activity."⁸

The AVMA's support for the initiative is strong, and also includes financial commitment, as justified in a March 18th press release,

The Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative (WVLDI) has arrived, and the AVMA is glad it's here. ... After forming in July 2013, the WVLDI is quickly positioning itself as an important group dedicated to filling a much-needed role as it works to support women in seeking and achieving leadership, policy- and decision-making positions within all areas of professional veterinary activity.

*The WVLDI's commitment to diversity and achieving leadership excellence in every sector of veterinary medicine is a natural fit with the AVMA's strategic goal of enhancing participation and engagement of our membership through the creation of a culture of inclusion, transparency and community.*⁹

From July 25th – 28th, WVLDI will be active at the AVMA Convention

Friday, July 25th, 1:00 – 4:50 pm

Colorado Convention Center, Room 702

Workshop: DEVELOP PRACTICAL SKILLS FOR BECOMING CONFIDENT AND EFFECTIVE LEADERS¹⁰

Sunday, July 27th, 2:00 – 3:00 pm

Colorado Convention Center, Room 207

THE INITIATIVE TO DEVELOP WOMEN LEADERS IN VETERINARY MEDICINE (Hot Topics Session)

Monday, July 28th, 8:00 – 11:50 am

Colorado Convention Center

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT SYMPOSIUM

8:00 - 8:50 Women's Leadership: Minding the Gap and Sharing Solutions

9:00 – 9:50 Women of Vetlandia: Secrets to Success in the World of Organized Veterinary Medicine

10:00 - 10:50 Stories from the Trenches: Leaders from Multiple Areas of Veterinary Medicine Share Experiences and Lessons Learned

11:00 – 11:50 Round Table Wrap Up: Q and A Healthy Discussion

Monday, July 28th, 3:00 – 4:00 pm

MEET AND GREET RECEPTION

AVMA Welcome Center, Colorado Convention Center

WVLDI Vision: To achieve leadership excellence in every sector of veterinary medicine that fully reflects the diversity of the profession and society.

WVLDI Mission: To support women in seeking and achieving leadership, policy, and decision-making positions within all areas of professional veterinary activity.

As one of the inaugural directors of WVLDI, I warmly invite you to participate in the above activities. Men are critical to the success of this initiative so, regardless of your gender or year of graduation, please get involved if you can. At a minimum, please share your thoughts about the future of balanced representation of our membership in all sectors of the profession.

¹ 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.

² Ibid.

³ Pritt, Stacy (DVM, MS, CPIA, DACAW; Director IACUC, University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center). Email to Donald Smith (Cornell University), July 17, 2014.

⁴ Three other directors, including a student representative and an *ex officio* representative from the AVMA; one of the original directors had to resign because of other responsibilities.

⁵ Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. "Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine: A Course for Veterinary Students." *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. April 2, 2014.

⁶ Cornell, Texas A&M, and Virginia-Maryland Regional Colleges of Veterinary Medicine.

⁷ Larkin, Malinda. "[Women's leadership group goes to school.](#)" *JAVMA News*, posted June 18, 2014.

⁸ CEVA US. "[Women's Veterinary Leadership Initiative Announces Ceva Animal Health as First Industry Sponsor.](#)" Feb 12, 2014.

⁹ AVMA@Work. "[Women's leadership initiative hitting its stride.](#)" March 18, 2014.

¹⁰ Smith, Donald F. and Julie Kumble. "Women's Leadership Development Workshop Featured at the 2014 AVMA Convention." *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. July 11, 2014.

KEYWORDS:

Karen Bradley
Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine
Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative
Douglas Aspros
Stacy Pritt
AVMA Convention
Western Veterinary Convention
North American Veterinary Conference

TOPIC:

Women's Leadership in Veterinary Medicine

LEADING QUESTION:

How did WVLDI get established?

META-SUMMARY:

The story behind how the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative was established.

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.