

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

The Veterinary Class of 2013

By Dr. Donald F. Smith

June 4, 2013

As the United States veterinary profession turns 150 year old this spring, 2,700 new veterinarians are graduating from our nation's colleges and schools of veterinary medicine. Adding another 900 graduates of foreign veterinary colleges who will return home to enter our workforce brings the total to approximately 3,600 new veterinarians.¹



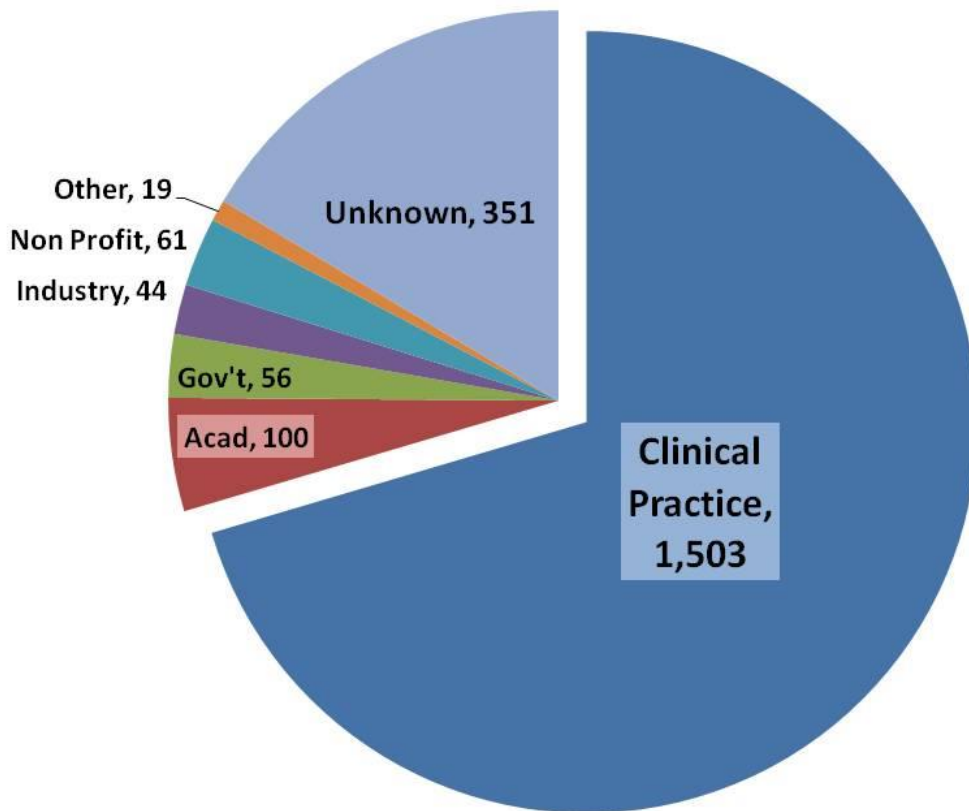
A celebratory banner honoring families and friends as well as the new veterinary graduates.
(Photo by the author)

Behind the celebration and high expectations, however, is the concern that the DVM degree² may not yield as immediate a return on investment as it did just a few years ago. Like last year and the year before, more students are graduating from larger domestic and foreign classes, and are competing for fewer jobs in some sectors. Average starting salaries are lower and educational debt is higher. To complicate matters, the increasing regulatory climate for small businesses, competition from internet and big box store sales of veterinary products, and the uncertain impact of new health care laws further challenge the operational bottom line of private practice.

But the good news is that the veterinary profession has survived significant ebbs and flows of supply and demand in the past. Nonetheless, we excogitate where these graduates will

be in ten years, after they have had a chance to settle into the profession following internships, the first one or two jobs, or graduate work.

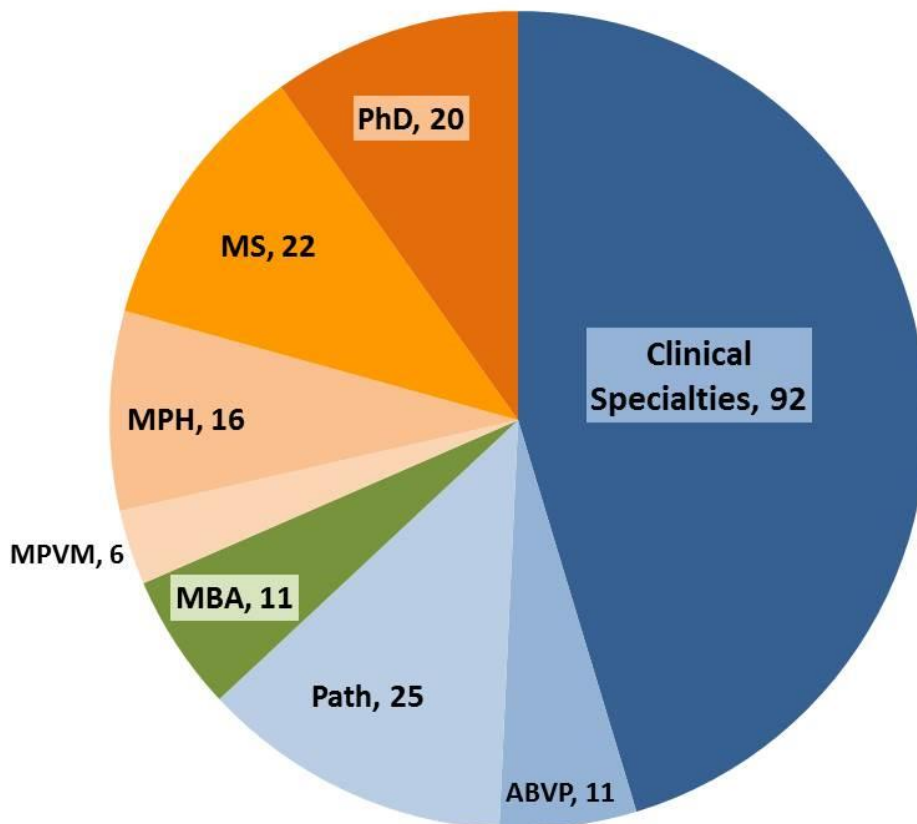
I remember the graduates of 2003 at the university where I work. As these now-seasoned veterinarians reconvene for reunion this weekend, let's take a look at what they and their over 2,100 peers around the country have done now that they are about 25% into their anticipated professional career.



Workforce Distribution of the 2,134 AVMA-member veterinarians who graduated from US or foreign veterinary colleges in 2003.³

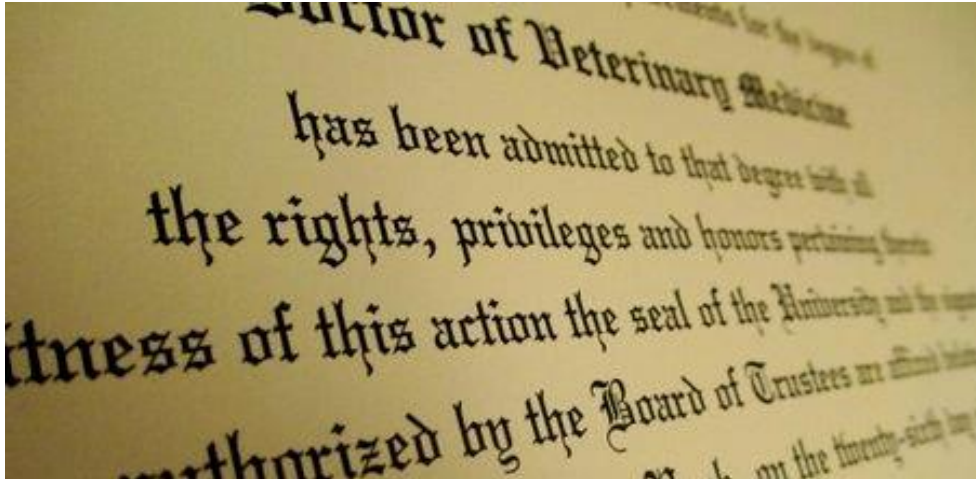
Of the 2,134 veterinarians from the Class of 2003 (US and foreign-educated) and for whom we have AVMA records, most are in private clinical practice (70%). Five percent are working in academia, many of those engaged also in clinical medicine. Other domains each employ three percent or fewer, and a substantial number (16%) did not provide a record of their activities.

Using a different metric, 75 (3.5%) of the 2003 graduates have completed graduate work in veterinary medicine or the biomedical sciences, public health, preventive medicine, or business (MBA).⁴ Over 100 (4.7%) have completed specialty clinical training leading to board certification or certification by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. Another 25 (1.2%) have attained board certification in various aspects of pathology and related disciplines (anatomic and clinical pathology, microbiology, laboratory animal medicine, poultry and preventive medicine).



Number of AVMA-member veterinarians who graduated in 2003 who have attained clinical specialties and graduate or professional degrees.⁵

The veterinary degree remains prized, uncommon, and treasured. Fewer than one in 100,000 people in the US will receive a veterinary diploma this spring. Regardless of the current climate, economic or otherwise, these are compelling odds in favor of our graduates making a long-term impact.



*The veterinary degree will be awarded to only one
in approximately 100,000 people in the US in 2013.*
(Photo by the author)

These are challenging times for the graduates of the Class of 2013, but the profession is as versatile as our new veterinarians are committed and creative. Ten years from now, entire new spheres of influence will have opened up for veterinary medicine. While some existing lines of work will have atrophied, other fields will be deeper and broader. The profession's progress in animal and human health will demand that veterinarians seek new ways to engage in work that truly matters, and our new graduates will have the opportunity to lead the way.

In a recent Wall Street Journal op-ed, Carl McCoy urges graduates to reach beyond the adage of, "Do what you love [as you enter the workforce]." Today's economic climate, he argues, requires us to, "Seek love as a consequence of meaningful work instead of as the motivation for it."⁶

Doing what we love is a wonderful aspiration but all of us as veterinarians need to understand that sometimes following a winding path and embracing what we don't particularly love often has the greatest impact on our growth as professionals and as human beings, and contributes to our crowning achievements.

¹ These are rounded numbers of those provided by the recent AVMA report: 2013 U.S. Workforce Study. HIS Healthcare & Phara and CHWS (The Center for Health Workforce Studies). 2013 U.S. Veterinary Workforce Study: Modeling Capacity Utilization.
<https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reports/Documents/Veterinarian-Workforce-Final-Report-LowRes.pdf>. p24, 25.

² The DVM is awarded by 27 of the 28 colleges and schools of veterinary medicine in the US. The University of Pennsylvania awards the VMD (*Veterinariae Medicinae Doctoris*). Many foreign schools award the BVSc or other degrees.

³ AVMA data (on line Member Directory), 2013 May 27.

⁴ It is possible that a few of these graduate or professional programs were completed before matriculating in veterinary college.

⁵ AVMA data (see iii above), 2013 May 27.

⁶http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324081704578237651740623228.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

KEYWORDS:

American Veterinary Medical Association
History of Veterinary Medicine
Veterinary Workforce
AVMA Workforce Study
Veterinary Debt
Veterinary Class of 2013
Veterinary Class of 2003
Commencement

TOPIC:

Veterinary Profession

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.