

Veterinary Research News

AVMA

AVMA adopts plan addressing vet profession's economic woes

The AVMA is undertaking a long-term, multimillion-dollar initiative to develop a strategy for reversing a troubling economic decline evident throughout much of the U.S. veterinary profession.

Following a series of meetings at AVMA headquarters Aug. 22-23, the Executive Board approved a package of proposals totaling more than \$5 million to aid a profession plagued by low numbers of client visits, skyrocketing veterinary student loan debt, and questions over whether the supply of veterinarians is outpacing demand for veterinary services.

A fiscally sound profession has been a strategic goal of the Association since 2008 and is articulated in the report of the AVMA 20/20 Vision Commission, which was charged with developing a vision for the Association. The scope of this new initiative, however, and the commitment of considerable Association resources signal a new willingness among the AVMA leadership to take a more active role in influencing the veterinary profession's economic future.

"I truly believe AVMA has to do this," AVMA President René A. Carlson said. "If we do not immediately begin addressing these challenges, then we will lose many of the valuable services veterinary medical professionals provide every day, including promoting animal health and welfare and ensuring a safe and plentiful food supply."

A component of the AVMA economic initiative is a pledge to make a reality of the vision statement "Veterinary medicine is a personally and financially rewarding profession." To that end, the Executive Board established a \$5 million fund in support of plans and programs to strengthen the U.S. veterinary profession's economic foundation.

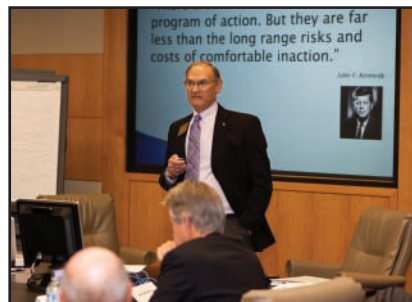
As soon as possible, a veterinary economics division will be created within the AVMA to manage economics programs and a veterinary economic strategy committee will be formed to advise the Executive Board. The Economics Vision Steering Committee will be continued with a new mission of forming partnerships to advance the AVMA's economic strategy.

And finally, the AVMA will provide its members with resources and information to help them improve their financial condition.

AVMA Executive Board Chair Ted Cohn said the Association is responding to members worried about the veterinary profession's economic future. "As a prime leader and the largest association of veterinarians within the profession, it is vital that we are aware of, and are responsive to, the needs of our members and the profession as a whole," Dr. Cohn explained.

"For AVMA to ignore these economic problems or place the burden on individual veterinarians would be reckless and indefensible," he added.

Dr. George Bishop, the AVMA House of Delegates liaison to the Executive Board, commended the board for its bold action to ease the economic burdens of the membership. He also expressed a common sentiment among board members that the AVMA alone cannot improve the veterinary economic situation but, instead, can serve best as a catalyst for change.



AVMA Executive Board Chair Ted Cohn makes a case for greater Association engagement in veterinary economic issues.

"By bringing us together to work toward a common goal," Dr. Bishop said, "the AVMA can provide economic analysis, education, research, programs, and leadership."

That the veterinary medical system suffers from a number of fundamental problems has been recognized for years. In 1999, the KPMG study on the U.S. market for veterinary services warned that the highly fragmented veterinary delivery system threatens the profession's economic viability. The imbalance between low salaries and high veterinary student debt was also one of a "group of serious problems" the study identified.

Subsequent surveys and research have found many of these problems persist today. In some cases, they're worse. Recently updated data from the AVMA (*JAVMA* 2011;239:953-957) show the mean veterinary educational debt among the 90 percent of fourth-year students with debt in 2011 was \$142,613, a 6.5 percent increase from the previous year. Excluding salaries for graduates pursuing advanced study, the mean starting salary for a veterinarian in 2011 was \$66,469, a 1.3 percent drop from 2010.

A number of factors are exacerbating the situation. Despite recent projections by the American Pet Products Association that pet industry spending in 2011 is on track to exceed \$50 billion, the Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study released this year revealed persistently low numbers of veterinary visits, an indication the public isn't convinced about the value of veterinary services.

Also of concern are the high rate of veterinary graduates entering private companion animal practice and a growing number of nonveterinarians offering services traditionally considered within the scope of veterinary medicine. In addition, questions have been raised about whether

graduates of AVMA-accredited foreign veterinary colleges practicing in the United States are creating competitive pressure on the domestic veterinary workforce.

Dr. Lonnie King, executive dean of The Ohio State University Health Sciences and dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine, participated in the Executive Board deliberations this past August. More than 10 years ago, he represented the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges on the committee tasked with finding answers to problems raised by the KPMG report. The result was the formation of the National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues in 2000.

The profession's response to NCVEI recommendations, such as updating fee structures and improving practice efficiency, was "uneven," according to Dr. King. "Some practices took the recommendations seriously and benefited, but many others didn't. It's more likely that veterinarians haven't really changed a lot of their business practices," he acknowledged.

The current economic climate for veterinary medicine is worse than when the KPMG report was released more than a decade ago, Dr. King said, and is a consequence of fundamental problems within the profession rather than a temporary setback sparked by the economic recession.

The nonprofit NCVEI is currently in the process of dissolving owing to funding difficulties. The AVMA is finalizing the purchase of commission assets, including the website, database, and brand.

Reasons why veterinary medicine finds itself in such difficult financial straits are more complex than most people realize, Dr. King said, and he anticipates that coming up with solutions for reversing the economic decline will be equally daunting, as will getting buy-in from all sectors of the profession and its industry partners.

Regardless of the difficulties, Dr. King considers the AVMA initiative to mobilize veterinarians to better their profession's economic future admirable and, at the end of the day, a necessity, not an option.

"If this is the most serious issue facing the profession, then it demands a bold strategy and a compelling set

of actions moving forward," he said. "Having a national plan and sounding the clarion call to action is really an important step."

Foreign accreditation, AVMA governance to be reviewed

The AVMA Executive Board has approved the goals and structures for two task forces in response to AVMA House of Delegates' requests for evaluations of Association governance and the role of the AVMA in accrediting foreign veterinary schools.

Each of the resolutions recommending the assessments won majority support during the HOD regular annual session this past July.

The VMAs from Arkansas, California, Louisiana, Montana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, and Utah submitted the resolution calling for a task force studying whether U.S. veterinarians benefit from the AVMA Council on Education's accreditation of foreign veterinary schools.

Questions about the role of the HOD brought about the resolution submitted by the Executive Board and House Advisory Committee to appoint a task force charged with determining whether the current AVMA governance structure will meet future needs of the membership, profession, and Association.

After conducting a thorough review of the two resolutions, the Executive Board structured the task forces so as to provide appropriate participation and proper focus on the issues, observed the HAC chair and HOD liaison to the Executive Board, Dr. George Bishop.

"I think the HOD will be pleased with the seriousness the Executive Board has demonstrated in establishing the task forces and will be very satisfied with the outcome," Dr. Bishop said.

The Task Force on Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation is charged with evaluating several issues, starting with the current environment and projected over 10 years. The group is to prepare a written informational report, "without prejudice," for the Executive Board.

Those issues will be the impact of foreign veterinary school accreditation on the U.S. veterinary profession, and the quality of standards for the

U.S. veterinary profession; the impact of not requiring certification by the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates or the Program for the Assessment of Veterinary Medical Education for graduates of AVMA Council on Education-accredited foreign schools; how foreign veterinary school accreditation serves the needs and interests of the public and of AVMA members; the existence of any international pressure on the COE to accredit foreign veterinary schools; and the logistic resources required to accredit foreign veterinary schools.

Nominations for the 11-member task force are already being accepted. Members will be appointed by an ad hoc committee consisting of the Executive Board chair, president, president-elect, executive vice president, House Advisory Committee chair, Student AVMA president, and task force chair. The task force chair will be appointed by the executive vice president and AVMA Board of Governors, which consists of the AVMA board chair, president, and president-elect.

The board appropriated \$25,000 for the task force's work, including up to two two-day meetings at AVMA headquarters.

The Task Force on Governance and Member Participation is charged with reviewing and evaluating the AVMA governance structure, including the Executive Board, HOD, councils, committees, task forces, commissions, trusts, and all other entities.

The review should account for an entity's purpose and effectiveness; member election or appointment method; and the quality, outcome, and satisfaction of membership involvement.

Additionally, the governance evaluation should determine whether the current structure will meet future needs of the membership, the profession, and the Association. The task force will develop a vision of the AVMA governance that considers the qualities and attributes of governance as generally outlined by the AVMA 20/20 Vision Commission in its final report to the board.

The board encourages the task force to use such resources as member input, external experts and consultants, and other information to

leverage and complement its knowledge and evaluation of AVMA governance.

The 11-member task force will be appointed by the same ad hoc committee that will name the Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation Task Force.

The board designated \$45,000 for the task force, which is authorized to hold up to three two-day meetings at AVMA headquarters.

Both task forces will be sunset following submission of their reports to the board.

AVMA, FVE strengthen ties with joint statements

For the first time, the AVMA and Federation of Veterinarians of Europe have adopted joint statements, and they relate to veterinary education, antimicrobials, and animal welfare.

The Executive Board approved the three joint statements Aug. 21, as did the FVE board the following week.

As part of the AVMA's growing partnership and collaboration with the FVE, it had been proposed that the organizations issue joint statements on topics of relevance to the veterinary profession.

The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe is an umbrella organization of veterinary organizations from 38 European countries.

It was noted that the two organizations share many of the same issues and concerns, and their respective positions and policies are much more in alignment than not. Initial versions of the joint statements were prepared and extensively reviewed by AVMA staff and officers and are consistent with AVMA policies on veterinary education, antimicrobials, and animal welfare.

The AVMA-FVE statements "Responsible and Judicious Use of Antimicrobials," "The Roles of Veterinarians in Ensuring Good Animal Welfare," and "Veterinary Education" are posted at www.avma.org under "Policy" in the Issues section.

The search is on for nominations to AVMA entities

One way that AVMA members can voice their views on veterinary issues is through service on one of the Association's councils, committees, task forces, or other entities.

Entity members provide much-needed expertise and add their insights on matters ranging from veterinary education and economic issues to legislation and animal welfare.

Dr. Ron DeHaven, AVMA CEO and executive vice president, said, "Much of the work of AVMA starts with our committees and councils. Participating on one of these groups provides a great way for a member to have a say and, ultimately, influence the AVMA positions and policies in an area of specific interest to the member. We need the active involvement of our members to ensure that we stay relevant and current in the broad array of issues affecting our profession.

"The time commitment does not have to be significant; indeed, I have never heard a member complain about the time commitment to serve on one of our councils or committees. What I do hear time and again from members is how personally rewarding the experience has been for them—often as they are seeking another volunteer position with AVMA."

Nominations are being sought for 90 vacancies.

The Executive Board will fill a variety of committee and trust vacancies at its April 2012 meeting. Nominations are also invited for two Political Action Committee Policy Board members, who will be appointed by the House Advisory Committee at its spring 2012 meeting. Committee and trust nominations must be submitted to the AVMA Office of the Executive Vice President by March 19, 2012.

Committee nominations, unless otherwise noted, may be made by local or state veterinary associations, by allied groups represented in the HOD, or by AVMA members on their own or another's behalf.

The HOD will fill council vacancies when it convenes in August 2012 in San Diego. Council nominations may be made by organizations represented in the AVMA House of Delegates or by petition of 10 voting members.

Nominations for councils must be submitted by April 1, 2012, to the AVMA Office of the Executive Vice President. Nominations for the Council on Education must be submitted by Feb. 1, 2012, so that the Council on Education Can-

didate Qualification Review Committee may review the nomination materials prior to the HOD election.

Nomination materials for councils, committees, trusts, and task forces, including descriptions of the entities and the open seats, are available at www.avma.org/about_avma/governance/volunteering/vacancies.asp, or by calling AVMA headquarters at (800) 248-2862, Ext. 6605, or emailing OfficeEVP@avma.org.

Practice

Researchers find possible broad-spectrum antiviral

Joining a pair of proteins can inhibit virus replication and cause infected animal cells to self-destruct, potentially providing a broad-spectrum antiviral, according to recently published research.

The article "Broad-Spectrum Antiviral Therapeutics," which was published July 27 at www.plosone.org, reports researchers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology developed a "chimeric protein" with one domain that binds to the double-stranded RNA produced during viral transcription or replication and a second that induces apoptosis when two or more of the proteins crosslink on the same double-stranded RNA.

In addition to tests on human cells, the researchers conducted proof-of-concept trials that showed decreased morbidity rates among mice challenged with influenza virus and no apparent toxicoses.

The double-stranded RNA-activated caspase oligomerizer, or DRACO, was nontoxic in 11 mammalian cell types and effective against 15 viruses. An announcement from the university states that the treatment was shown to be effective against H1N1 influenza virus, common cold viruses, a stomach virus, adenoviruses, a poliovirus, dengue fever virus, and several other hemorrhagic fever viruses.

The article is available from PLoS ONE (2011;6:e22572).

Issues

Carbon dioxide cooling may reduce Salmonella risk

Rapidly cooling eggs with carbon dioxide could decrease the risk posed by *Salmonella*, according to recent research.

A cooling process developed through research at Purdue University appears to not only inhibit bacterial growth but also alter the pH in the eggs sufficiently to increase the activity of lysozyme, an enzyme that lyses gram-positive bacteria, a university announcement states. The gas is drawn into the egg shell during cooling, reversing the pH rise that occurs as carbon dioxide escapes from freshly laid eggs.

The announcement indicates increasing such lysozyme activity would increase safety of the eggs.

Kevin M. Keener, PhD, a professor of food science and one of the study authors, said previous evaluations of use of the carbon dioxide cooling process have indicated the treatment would cost 3 to 7 cents for every dozen eggs, with the largest portion of that cost coming from delivery of the gas. A commercial version of the cooling system could bring egg temperatures to 45 degrees in less than two minutes, preventing population explosions among the small numbers of *Salmonella* organisms deposited near or on the yolk membranes in about 1 in 10,000 eggs, he said.

Dr. Keener said additional research indicated egg quality was substantially improved among eggs treated with the rapid cooling method, and a report on those findings was under review.

The article "Influence of carbon dioxide on the activity of chicken egg white lysozyme" was published in the journal *Poultry Science* (Poult Sci 2011;90:889-895). More information is available at <http://ps.fass.org>.

Millions awarded in search for nonsurgical sterilant

The search for a nonsurgical sterilant for dogs and cats has been fueled

by more than \$6 million in research grants since 2008 when a \$25 million prize was offered to the first person to successfully develop a method of chemically castrating pets.

In the three years following the Found Animals Foundation's launch of the Michelson Prize & Grants program, the private nonprofit has received more than 150 letters of intent, and some 50 investigators were asked to submit full grant proposals.

As of August, 15 grants totaling more than \$6 million had been awarded to researchers in the United States and around the world, according to Found Animals.

"We are thrilled with the high level of interest we've seen from qualified applicants to date and we are confident that we'll see many more proposals of equal excellence in the future," said Aimee Gilbreath, Found Animals executive director.

"What's even more exciting is that we're seeing proposals based on new technologies, such as nanocontainers and gene silencing, meaning that researchers are applying cutting-edge science to this problem, which was our hope when launching the program," Gilbreath said.

In addition to the \$25 million incentive to the first person to successfully develop a nonsurgical method for sterilizing cats and dogs, the Michelson Grants in Reproductive Biology offers up to \$50 million in overall funding for promising research in pursuit of nonsurgical sterilization technology. The Foundation seeks proposals for up to \$250,000 per year for a maximum three years of funding.

The Michelson Prize & Grants program is named after Found Animals'

creator Gary Michelson, a billionaire orthopedic spinal surgeon and philanthropist who wants to see an end to the nation's dog and cat overpopulation crisis.

Research proposals are reviewed by Found Animals' scientific advisory board, which is made up of scientists from a variety of relevant fields, including reproductive biology, immunology, biotechnology, drug development, and animal welfare.

"Through the interest we've seen so far, we're confident this innovative program is moving in the right direction, and we're excited about what's in store with this group of elite researchers," said Dr. Shirley Johnston, director of scientific research for Found Animals, who oversees the Michelson Prize & Grants program.

Learn more about the Michelson Prize and Michelson Grants in Reproductive Biology at <http://michelson.foundanimals.org/>, where resources on applying for the prize and grant program are also available.

Correction

The article "6 factors in declining veterinary visits" in the March 2011 issue of *Veterinary Research News* misstated a finding from the survey of pet owners in the Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Study. The finding that 64 percent of cats and 86 percent of dogs visited a veterinarian in the past year applies only to pets whose owners had visited a veterinarian in the past two years. Among all pet owners in the survey, 60 percent had taken their cat and 85 percent had taken their dog to a veterinarian in the past year. 🐾