

# Letters to the Editor

## Employment of recent graduates

In her recent letter to the editor,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Rotman suggests that “if we can decrease student debt, then possibly owners won’t have to pay their associates quite as much.” I disagree with this, however, and suggest that in all situations, recent graduates actually need to be paid more, as higher salaries will allow them to not only pay off their educational debts, but also improve the quality of their lives. I believe that we should not give in to perceived pressures to charge less for our services because there will always be less money to take care of animals than is needed and that it is self-defeating and detrimental to veterinary medicine to charge less and or offer free veterinary care. First, we take care of our own; then, we consider offering free care. I will not allow the veterinarians who work with me to graduate into a form of indentured servitude.

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1. Rotman D. Unemployment and underemployment (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2013;242:1630.

In regard to the recent letters to the editor from Drs. Goldenson<sup>1</sup> and Rotman<sup>2</sup> concerning the problem of underemployment of veterinarians, I wanted to raise two additional points that have yet to be introduced. First, as the new owner of an especially busy veterinary hospital in Chicago, I can’t wait to hire my first associate veterinarian. Having an associate will allow me to expand my hours and accommodate more patients as well as focus on the administrative demands that I too often can only juggle fleetingly. At least in the Chicago area, we have a number of new hospitals that are hiring veterinarians. One can argue about the economic impact of increased hospital density in large metropolitan areas versus less populated

areas and the impact that a growing number of veterinarians and veterinary hospitals will have, over time, on the industry in those large metropolitan areas, but at least at present, there are still jobs to be had.

Second, it seems that we too often think of new graduates as a collection of passive entities, each with an inherent untapped value and each with an exorbitant present and future cost to themselves and everyone around them. But they are individuals, and those individuals who reach out to others will often get the attention they seek. In my two years as owner of a growing hospital, I have not heard from a single veterinary college placement office and have heard from only a scant few new graduates. Granted, I have not yet advertised and only recently realized that I had a need for an additional veterinarian, but that doesn’t mean my hospital hasn’t been on the radar of anyone doing a basic Internet search of animal hospitals in Chicago. If the veterinary colleges are going to continue to produce new graduates every year, then perhaps they should be more aggressive in helping those new graduates find employment. And, if there already are underemployed veterinarians out there, then perhaps each of those new graduates needs to take a more aggressive role in determining his or

her own destiny. Just some food for thought.

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1. Goldenson F. Unemployment and underemployment (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2013;242:1630.
2. Rotman D. Unemployment and underemployment (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2013;242:1630.

## Veterinary applicants

I am very much encouraged by the information and plan presented in the recent *JAVMA* News article “National veterinary applicant plan in the works.”<sup>1</sup> Instead of advocating for the use of quotas in veterinary admission policies, the AVMA executive board established a working group to, among other things, develop a plan to enhance delivery of information about veterinary medicine to students historically underrepresented in the profession. As well, board members recognized that the escalating costs of education, both undergraduate and veterinary, can be a roadblock for both students and the profession. The lack of access to personal financial resources should not in itself be an obstacle to qualified, motivated students who aspire to a career in veterinary medicine, but the six-figure educational debts that some veterinary students incur are nearly insurmountable. Universities often bristle at the suggestion that the solution to such costs may

### Instructions for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters to the editor. Letters may not exceed 500 words and 6 references. Letters to the Editor must be original and cannot have been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Not all letters are published; all letters accepted for publication are subject to editing. Those pertaining to anything published in the *JAVMA* should be received within one month of the date of publication. Submission via e-mail ([JournalLetters@avma.org](mailto:JournalLetters@avma.org)) or fax (847-925-9329) is encouraged; authors should give their full contact information, including address, daytime telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.

Letters containing defamatory, libelous, or malicious statements will not be published, nor will letters representing attacks on or attempts to demean veterinary societies or their committees or agencies. Viewpoints expressed in published letters are those of the letter writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policies of the AVMA.

involve decreasing tuition or at least limiting increases to the current rate of inflation, but perhaps these options should be closely examined.

It will be interesting to see what impact the dominance of women in the profession will have over the next 30 years or so, and interesting to see if the financial realities of veterinary education and subsequent employment have an effect on the change in the gender makeup of the profession. One other interesting aspect to study would be the apparent relative lack of interest in private practice ownership among associate veterinarians and whether this has any relationship to the shift in the gender ratio of recent graduates.

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1. National veterinary applicant plan in the works. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2013;243:310.

I am writing to encourage members of the AVMA to join the discussion on the need for greater diversity in our profession. Recent initiatives suggest that the AVMA is taking a somewhat different approach on the subject. However, I believe that there also need to be programs that introduce elementary age children in historically underrepresented populations to animals. By engendering a love for animals, these programs will inculcate responsibility, engender empathy, and increase the likelihood that students will pursue a career in the animal care field. The last speaker at the recent diversity seminar in Chicago, Dr. Sandra San Miguel, discussed how the Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine has worked with a primary school in an underserved community in Indianapolis to develop a comprehensive, hands-on educational program introducing students to information on animal science.

I have had a similar experience to the one described by Dr. San Miguel. Five years ago, PAL (People. Animals. Love.) implemented an after-school program and summer camp at Stanton Elementary, a school in Anacostia, the poorest section of the District of Columbia.

Here, 65% of the kids come from single-parent homes, with most living in subsidized housing and all receiving food stamps. The school had failed to meet benchmarks set under the No Child Left Behind Act for 7 years in a row.

Stanton Elementary became a charter school under Philadelphia Scholars Academy. With their help, PAL received a 5-year, \$1.2 million grant from the DC Office of the State Superintendent for Education. After the first year, the grant was increased to \$1.5 million so the program could be expanded within Stanton. Last year, PAL became involved with a second charter school, and PAL is currently working with approximately 280 kids in the combined after-school program, with a waiting list of over 50 kids at each school.

The PAL curriculum was written by 5 science teachers from various private schools in Washington, DC, and the program was funded by a generous donation from Pfizer Animal Health. An important aspect of the program is that the curriculum, lesson plans, and slideshow presentations are available to teachers online.

Recently, Stanton Elementary has seen substantial improvements in reading and math scores. These improvements occurred after the PAL program had been in place 3 years.

I believe the AVMA and Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges have important roles to play in making veterinary medicine attractive for children living in underserved areas, but I believe our attention must be channeled toward younger children and that we should start enticing the youngest generation to become involved with animals. In this way, the face of veterinary medicine can begin to look more like the face of the United States as a whole.

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### **Foreign veterinary school accreditation**

I am writing in response to the recent decision by the AVMA Executive Board to authorize the AVMA Council on Education (COE) to

continue accrediting foreign veterinary colleges.<sup>1</sup>

According to the AVMA By-laws, the COE shall “[m]eet the needs of society by promoting active programs in veterinary medical education by, among other things, encouraging and assisting schools and colleges of veterinary medicine to meet the requirements for full accreditation.” In light of this portion of the COE’s charge, I contend that the COE should be considering societal needs, specifically contemporary US societal needs, when it sets and interprets the standards for accreditation.

The current system of accreditation and the current 11 standards evolved around the US-Canadian educational model. Two of the more important aspects of this model, to my mind, are that veterinary college applicants have all attended an undergraduate college (although they may not have all earned an undergraduate degree) and that veterinary colleges are a major division of a larger university system that includes undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs. The fact that applicants have received at least some undergraduate instruction means that they enter veterinary college with educational experience beyond that of the typical high school graduate, while the fact that veterinary colleges are a division of a larger university system means that they have greater opportunities for collaboration with other related professions, including education, human medicine, and public health.

The curriculum at veterinary colleges in the United States and Canada has also been developed to include material related to diseases endemic to North America, domestic animal management techniques, and domestic considerations related to food safety and animal welfare.

In considering the ongoing accreditation of foreign veterinary colleges, I worry that at least some of the colleges that would apply for accreditation do not use the same template as domestic schools, making it more difficult to determine whether they comply with the standards for accreditation. At least some foreign veterinary colleges, for instance, accept students after

high school, without requiring any undergraduate education. Some are not part of a larger university system, and others do not have well-established clinical or basic research programs. In addition, although pass rates for the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination have traditionally been used for outcomes assessment, many graduates of foreign veterinary colleges do not take this examination.

I worry, therefore, that in accrediting additional foreign

veterinary colleges, the COE might be tempted to try to accommodate some of the substantial cultural and educational differences of these foreign schools in the accreditation process by, for example, altering its interpretation of the existing accreditation standards. Because each standard is assessed independently, small changes in interpretation for even a few standards may have a cumulative effect, resulting in a deviation from the intended result. I urge

COE members, therefore, to keep contemporary US societal needs foremost in their minds when applying the standards for accreditation, even when applying those standards to foreign veterinary colleges.

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1. Board keeps course on foreign veterinary school accreditation. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2013;243:312.