

Letters to the Editor

What kind of education makes a veterinarian?

The kind of education veterinary students need depends on the kind of veterinarians we want them to be. The quality of our current veterinary medical college faculties is impressive,¹ yet current veterinary medical curricula cannot produce finished veterinarians.² They can only provide a basic knowledge of the medical sciences and their practical employment, while preparing graduates to continue learning throughout their varied careers.

The path to a veterinary career begins with a well-planned undergraduate education. Although academic excellence is the prime requisite for admission into veterinary college, more emphasis should be given to applicants' nonacademic qualities, especially aptitudes and attitudes respecting veterinary medicine. Also, determined efforts must be made to secure a more diverse veterinary student body.

The typical veterinary medical curriculum consists of 4 years divided into preclinical and clinical education. But, this division is not ideal, and the 2 years of preclinical education would be more relevant if they incorporated clinical experience and if clinicians helped design and teach biomedical courses.

Students cannot possibly assimilate the vast quantities of information they receive, yet they are led to believe success depends on memorizing as many details as possible. This diminishes conceptual learning. Information-intense lectures and online coursework should be interspersed with supervised workshops during which students can actively participate in their own education. Standardized multiple-choice tests and rankings based on grade point averages are outmoded and could be replaced with descriptive examinations, pass-fail evaluations, and scholarly endeavors such as essay projects

exploring current topics in veterinary medicine to enhance their analytic and communication skills.

During the clinical training years, students should be able to choose elective rotations in those areas of practice where their primary career interests lie (ie, tracking). These electives should include college-based and community-based (ie, distributive teaching) assignments.

Veterinary education needs a major shift from focusing on individual domestic animal diseases to integrating human, animal, and ecosystem health. Such a change is indispensable if the profession expects to be a leader in the field of one health.

An important part of education is personal development; the teachers and students, not the curriculum, are the critical elements. Colleges must sustain a genuine culture of inclusion and trust throughout their diverse academic communities. Addressing students' personal needs requires compassionate faculty mentoring supplemented by health support and financial advice from professional counselors. Administrators should give faculty sufficient time to establish mentor-mentee relationships and formulate guidelines for selecting good role models. Personal and professional education are inseparable.

Finally, the cost of earning a veterinary medical degree is too great, and it is disturbing that tuition and debt continue to

increase. This cannot last; colleges will have to reduce educational expenditures substantially to avoid serious complications.

Creating veterinarians is more than providing the knowledge and skills needed to practice veterinary medicine. Students need the kind of experience described in a statement attributed to Albert Einstein: "Education is what remains when you have forgotten all the facts you ever learned."

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1. Hodgson JL, Pelzer JM. *Veterinary medical education: a practical guide*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017.
2. Cary JA, Farnsworth CH, Gay J, et al. Stakeholder expectations regarding the ability of new veterinary graduates to perform various diagnostic and surgical procedures. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2017;251:172-184.

Origin of the word "veterinarian"

Regarding the recent letter¹ from Dr. Lester Crawford discussing the origin of the word "veterinarian," I would like to add an interesting fact about that word. As we, the Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine's class of 1968, were preparing to graduate, Dean W.W. Armistead mentioned that "veterinarian" is the only word in the English lan-

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guage that comprises six vowels, six consonants, and six syllables.

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1. Crawford LM. Origin of the word “veterinarian” (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2017;251:266.

As an addendum to the letter from Dr. Lester Crawford¹ discussing

the origin of the word “veterinarian,” I would like to address the word’s pronunciation. I frequently hear “veterinarian” pronounced by my colleagues as though it were spelled “vetnarian” (vet-’ner-ē-ən), “vetranarian” (ve-trə-’ner-ē-ən), or even “vetinarian” (ve-tə-’ner-ē-ən), and it is not uncommon to hear incorrect pronunciations even at continuing education meetings by featured speakers.

I solicit my fellow veterinarians to give some consideration to pronouncing our esteemed title correctly: ve-tə-rə-’ner-ē-ən.

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1. Crawford LM. Origin of the word “veterinarian” (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2017;251:266.