

Letters to the Editor

In praise of women who choose career and family

I read with interest your Forum article on professional women titled "Women in veterinary medicine" (*JAVMA*, Aug 15, 2000, pp 472–476). Sixteen years ago, when I was in veterinary school, my mentors were primarily women who had chosen career over family. Now it seems more popular for women to try to have both.

Contrary to the results of the study mentioned, most of the professional women I know (who have young children, the study did not qualify this point) do not work as many hours as men. I do not believe this is an insult, but a testament to their character.

This is not to say women who choose to have career and family and work long hours are not good mothers. On the contrary, they may be excellent mothers, but they pay a price of how much time they have to enjoy motherhood and let it enrich their lives.

In my opinion, when the women's movement started, women tried very hard to be more like men. Women had not been career oriented in previous generations, and they did not know what they did best in the working world, because they had no role models.

But women are excellent veterinarians. And we are learning to accept who we are and what we do best. We are technically competent, careful, observant, and analytical; we know our opinions, but we have respect for others. We listen before we dictate. We understand feelings, emotions, and body language, and if we are smart, we confront them when needed.

Most veterinary clients are women. They want to know their choices, and they want their feelings to be heard. They are happy to see a lady veterinarian. But, as mothers, they understand when that lady needs more time to spend with her children. We cannot erase thousands of years of nurturing

instinct in one fell swoop, and why would we want to? These very characteristics are what make us great as practitioners.

What's wrong with taking a little time off in the life cycle to raise our children? Are we afraid someone will laugh at us, look down at us, or say I told you so? Certainly not our children. Probably not ourselves in 20 years. Can we allow ourselves to be intimidated by strangers who harbor personal resentments, fears, and jealousies of their own?

My husband and I are both veterinarians. I have been lucky to have a career and a family without having to do it all at once. I was a practice owner for 12 years, but for now I work at my husband's practice when he needs help. As our children grow older and more independent, I can reenter the work force full time with renewed zest and a clearer understanding of life for having taken the time to be a mother.

*Stacey B. Gerhart, DVM
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In opposition of forced molting

I am sure many AVMA members found the debate on forced molting of laying hens interesting and appreciate that the AVMA considers the subject serious (*JAVMA*, Sept 1, 2000, p 634). Through petition and personal letters, many of us asked the AVMA to change its position statement to oppose the practice of forced molting when it causes harm to the birds. Although other issues brought before the House of Delegates for a vote were

discussed at length, it seems odd to me that there was no reported discussion about the rationale for rejecting the resolution for the AVMA to oppose forced molting. The AVMA must be held accountable for the fact that the egg industry has repeatedly used the AVMA position to defend the industry practice of food deprivation for profit. On what ethical and scientific grounds does the AVMA defend its current position, and why does it not oppose this cruel practice?

*Gordon B. Stull, VMD
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Dr. Koschmann responds:

I appreciate Dr. Stull's letter regarding the ongoing debate on the AVMA's position on induced molting of layer hens. During my tenure on the AVMA Animal Welfare Committee, this issue has been revisited by our committee on nearly a biannual basis. Space is not sufficient in "Letters to the Editor" to review arguments presented by those representing both sides of this issue, but our membership has been given information on induced molting in the Jul 1, 2000 *JAVMA* article (pp 8–10), "Shedding light on induced molting." I encourage our members to review this article to gain additional insight.

Data from studying jungle fowl in their natural environment reveal that brooding hens lose up to 24% of their total body weight, similar to weight changes sought by the poultry industry during a molt. On the basis of current scientific research, inducing molt on layer flocks extends the life of individual birds and gives layers a period of

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rest to increase their bone density and remove fat from their liver and abdominal fat pad. The process ultimately brings birds back into production with better quality eggs. Without induced molting, it is estimated that 47% more hens would be needed in production, and that 47% more male chicks would be killed as a spin-off of this policy change. The AVMA recognizes that additional research is needed to find alternative methods of inducing and synchronizing molt in layers and also realizes that resolutions brought forward each year on this issue have been fraught with factual errors.

The AVMA Animal Welfare Committee comprises 13 individuals who are from diverse backgrounds within our profession but share a common foundation of love and respect for animals and their welfare. Members carefully weigh ethical and scientific viewpoints presented by persons representing all sides of an issue and spend many hours of volunteer time reading additional background material in hope of ultimately making educated decisions on these complex topics. A portion of our committee's membership changes every few years, so fresh minds are reviewing induced molting in layer hens each time the issue comes before the committee. Thus far, our committee, the AVMA Executive Board, and the House of Delegates have each felt that the AVMA should disapprove resolutions calling the practice of induced molting "inhumane." Although each AVMA member may not be privy to all arguments presented on this topic, all can be assured that their concerns are being heard by our committee.

*James R. Koschmann, DVM, MS
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Dr. Haynes responds:

Dr. Stull's concerns appear to be two-fold: the AVMA position on induced molting and a perceived lack of discussion on the issue within the AVMA HOD. My intent is to correct any misconceptions regarding the latter.

When a resolution is brought before the HOD, it is reviewed by the Executive Board and the House

Advisory Committee and is then sent to a reference committee of the HOD, which votes on the resolution and makes a recommendation to the HOD. During the reference committee meeting, there is opportunity for presentation of information by individuals who represent all sides of an issue even though they are not members of the committee. Following these presentations and any ensuing discussion, the reference committee votes on the resolution and makes a recommendation to the HOD. Discussion by the members of the HOD follows, and a final vote is taken.

This process was followed for resolutions on induced molting presented to the HOD in 1999 and 2000. Ample time was provided for individuals supporting and opposing the resolutions to provide information and comment during reference committee discussions each year, and individuals representing those perspectives did so. Information presented in 2000 did not differ substantially from that provided in 1999, and this may have reduced the amount of discussion Dr. Stull might have expected by the HOD.

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Concerns about euthanasia report

The JAVMA news report on the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia (Sept 1, 2000, pp 636-637) provided a brief overview of a controversial issue, which may have repercussions that will affect the reputation of the AVMA and its members. The critical issues are those of process and content.

In July, the Executive Board, although strongly divided, approved the Report of the Panel on Euthanasia by a single vote. Subsequently, the House of Delegates unanimously disapproved that decision. Despite that clear message, and continued dissonance among board members, the board upheld its marginal approval.

The report process was rife with contention. The panel, formed in 1998, was increased from 7 to 17

persons to embrace a wider field of expertise. They met only once in November 1999, expressing concerns that additional meetings were necessary. However, only electronic correspondences occurred, often without agreement. The 60-page draft report comment period was limited to 5 days, including the July 4th holiday weekend. Those of us solicited for comments were frustrated by insufficient review time and returned abbreviated comments, if any at all. The panel had one day to review the comments without seeing the final report before its submission to the board.

The AVMA has defined euthanasia as the act of inducing humane death in an animal. The method should minimize the animal's stress and anxiety and result in rapid unconsciousness followed by cardiac or respiratory arrest and ultimate loss of brain function preceding death. Inherent in the euthanasia process, we must have control over the animal. The draft report should satisfy the AVMA criteria for euthanasia, but it does not.

Some physical methods of euthanasia identified in the report, such as kill traps (body-crushing devices) and thoracic compression (manual suffocation) do not meet AVMA criteria. The report even stated that kill traps must be modified from manufacturer's designs to improve performance, nullifying any standards to ensure humanness or control over the animal killed. Use of kill traps and thoracic compression is based on convenience, not science, and should not be part of an AVMA document on euthanasia.

The 1993 report has been the "gold standard" for veterinarians and nonveterinarians in animal shelters, animal control agencies, zoos, and wildlife management. It has been incorporated in state and federal government regulations for domestic and wild animals as the referenced standard for animal euthanasia. The report has sweeping ramifications beyond the traditional veterinary community. We must recognize how this document reflects on us. It is incumbent upon us to uphold our professional ethics and standards and endorse only that which satisfies the level

of quality, credibility, and humanness that we expect of ourselves.

I encourage my colleagues to critically read and comment on this report, recognizing that although it is a work in progress, requiring periodic updating and revision, the time for immediate revision is now, before we face the consequences of a tarnished gold standard.

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Feels alternative and complementary therapies need scientific evidence

Dean J. Monti reported on Dr. Lynn S. Peck's talk at the AVMA Convention in Salt Lake City (JAVMA, Sept 15, 2000, p 800). Monti began with the observation that many in the veterinary profession cringe at the mere mention of the various alternative and complementary therapies. We cringe, true enough, but at the things that proponents say in defense of these therapies. We cringe, because proponents see validation in their therapies by virtue of their simply expressing their fervently held belief in efficacy based on what? On the basis of some of their previous letters, alternative medicine proponents seem indignant at the cringer's call for scientific evidence. There are only two other kinds of evidence, philosophical and revealed. Alternative medicine proponents mainly put forth revealed evidence. Some of their defenses truly do make some of us cringe.

For example, alternative modalities have been around for ages; therefore, they must be good. The rule: Any treatment that has been around for ages must be efficacious. Suddenly, the proponents don't want to go there when challenged with some other things that have been around for ages. But they continue to parrot the claim based on longevity!

Another example: A 1990 survey indicated that 34% of animal owners used alternative therapies, whereas a 1997 survey indicated an increase to 42%. The rule: If it is on the increase, it must be good. Now let's apply that rule to the somewhat similar data on cheating in college. Let's embrace cheating!

And please, don't point to the truism that much of traditional practice has not been scientifically validated. For in doing so, you invoke another rule—as long as we are using some hokey stuff on our clients, we are justified in using a lot of hokey stuff on them. I don't think so.

Bruce C. Anderson, DVM, PhD
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Contamination of feedstuffs caused by farm dogs

The point-source exposure to *Neospora caninum* in dog feces was highlighted in the beef cow herd abortion studies of M. M. McAllister et al (JAVMA, Sep 15, 2000, pp 881–887). They emphasized the need to prevent inadvertent contamination of feedstuffs by feces of domestic dogs, the definitive host of *N caninum*.

I'm not so sure the contamination is totally inadvertent. My observations, having "lived" on over 350 dairies during the late 1980s were as follows: farm dogs follow the feed truck and will climb into the feed bunk to defecate on the freshly mixed ration. Likewise, freshly distributed alfalfa in the feedbunk is a preferred "deposit" site. I have pictures of more than a few cases. Leave a little loose silage from the "face" of a silage or haylage pit, and Rover will add his supplement, free of charge. He cares not about the formulation of the total mixed ration.

Elsewhere, I witnessed a fellow break open a bale of alfalfa, and one flake from the end of the bale fell flat. A few minutes later there was a spectacular pile of doggie doo-doo right in the middle of that flake. I must hypothesize that there is a powerful, aromatic attractant in freshly prepared cattle feed (and my front lawn), which irresistibly draws man's best friend and provokes its nasocolonic evacuation reflex. Dogs must be completely controlled in food-producing establishments, in light of their undesirable propensities.

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The authors respond:

Dr. Anderson provides some useful observations based on his

experience. However, it isn't clear to us what he means when he recommends complete control of dogs on food-producing establishments, so we would like to briefly discuss this issue. Many farmers value their dogs and are unlikely to remove them. Therefore, methods of managing dogs around livestock are needed to allow farmers the option of electing to keep dogs, but at the same time reduce the risk of transmission of *Neospora caninum* between dogs and cattle. Limiting the number of dogs is one reasonable step, so spaying and neutering should be encouraged. The use of containers and fences to limit canine access to stored feeds also appears to be a logical step, as does prompt disposal of bovine carcasses and offal so that dogs are less likely to eat them.¹

Although we expect that the risk of *N caninum* transmission to cattle can be substantially reduced, no management scheme will completely eliminate that risk, even if a premises is without dogs. Many feeds are purchased and have an unknown storage history, and pastures and crops could be contaminated by feral dogs.

One other point seems salient in regards to the risk associated with defecation by dogs into feed-bunks. *Neospora caninum* oocysts are shed unsporulated, and probably are not infectious to cattle until they have sporulated (at least 1 day under optimum conditions). Therefore, we speculate that when Rover leaves doo-doo in the feed bunk, this may be a less important method of transmitting *N caninum* compared to defecation onto stored feeds.

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1. McAllister M, Wallace D. Reduce your herd's risk of *Neospora* abortion. *Hoard's Dairyman* 1999;438.