

Letters to the Editor

Support for veterinary nurse title

Way back in 1959, I wrote an article for the journal *Modern Veterinary Practice* urging the development of a formal veterinary nursing profession. Years later, I was pleased to see the establishment of the veterinary technician profession but disappointed that, unlike in the United Kingdom, the term technician was used.

So, I was delighted to see that the term veterinary nurse is again being considered.¹ To me, Registered Veterinary Nurse is accurate and preferable, as this title acknowledges the formal training and accreditation of the professional person holding it.

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1. Larkin M. Technicians pushing for new name: veterinary nurse. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2016;248:869-870.

More on funding of new US veterinary schools

I read with interest the letter by Buntain et al,¹ who argue that opening a new veterinary school at the University of Arizona is a better way to address the shortage of veterinarians in rural practice than the previously published suggestion² of providing scholarships to students with an interest in rural practice who are attending existing schools. Because there have been ongoing articles in the local press about dwindling numbers of rural veterinarians in Arizona, I periodically search the want ads of the Arizona Veterinary Medical Association, Southern Arizona Veterinary Medical Association, AVMA, and American Association of Bovine Practitioners to see how many positions are advertised in Arizona. Consistently, however, it seems that advertised openings for rural practice are few and far between. I have been told privately that some rural practitioners make

no effort to sell their practices when they retire, so job openings are not reflective of the true market for rural practitioners. But, if a practice has any economic value, why would a retiring owner make no effort to sell it?

An important question is how many more rural practitioners can be supported in Arizona. To estimate the number of new rural veterinary practice jobs potentially sustainable in Arizona, one could take estimated total annual veterinary expenditures by Arizona food animal producers (assuming access to all desired veterinary services), divide by gross revenue generated by the typical Arizona rural practitioner, and then subtract the number of current rural practitioners in the state. Similarly, to estimate the number of new practitioners required each year to replace retiring rural practitioners, one could survey current rural practitioners to determine when they anticipate retiring.

If these types of economic analyses suggest smaller rather than larger numbers of rural practitioners will be needed, there is an economic argument to be made for giving scholarships to students at existing veterinary schools interested in rural practice, instead of opening another school. These calculations could be done on a national level as well. Regardless, I believe offering scholarships to veterinary students committed to rural practice

careers is a reasonable way to make rural practice more affordable for young practitioners.

I am also troubled by the statement¹ that an interest in rural practice will play a substantial role in deciding which students to admit to the University of Arizona's School of Veterinary Medicine. Given the huge economic impact of small animal practice within the state, why should students interested in this career path be given less preference than those interested in rural practice? It is my hope that the University of Arizona does not lose sight of urban small animal practice's place in the profession as it seeks to solve issues related to rural practice.

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1. Buntain B, Dial S, Besselsen DG, et al. In defense of funding new US veterinary schools (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2016;248:989-990.
2. Lane DM. Troubling economic landscape in rural practice (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2016;248:367.

The ongoing debate over new veterinary schools

The recent letter from Buntain et al¹ adds another perspective to the controversy^{2,3} surrounding the establishment of new veterinary schools. I feel privileged to have been involved in the development of three new veterinary colleges:

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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.

the Virginia-Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine in the 1980s and 1990s and the University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and Lincoln Memorial University College of Veterinary Medicine more recently.

The prerequisites for establishing a new veterinary school are much the same as those required for any new business: imagination and innovation, time and money, and relentless determination and persistence. But, without adequate resources, everything else is moot. The idea⁴ that money designated to create new schools could be diverted to existing institutions is unworkable for logistical and political reasons. The crucial question is not how much money schools have to spend, but how wisely they spend the money they have.

Although the University of Arizona's School of Veterinary Medicine is designed to produce veterinary graduates who will practice in areas of societal need,¹ there are lingering concerns that opening new schools will generate too many veterinarians in general. Interestingly, the projected output from proposed new veterinary schools is roughly similar to the collective increase in class size at existing schools. For several years, existing veterinary colleges have been balancing their budgets by increasing enrollment and tuition. Not only is this an unsustainable strategy, it has also done little, in my opinion, to support innovation in veterinary education. New

schools can, I believe, be more creative and nimble, unfettered by tradition and opposition from faculty and alumni. I know from experience that new colleges are capable agents of change in veterinary education not just through implementation of novel curricular design and delivery but also through reassessment of the standards of accreditation.^{3,5} Change is inevitable, and the profession can move forward or backward.

The University of Arizona's School of Veterinary Medicine may still need to undergo some changes to meet accreditation standards. Nevertheless, it appears poised to help redefine veterinary education for the 21st century.

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1. Buntain B, Dial S, Besselsen DG, et al. In defense of funding new US veterinary schools (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2016;248:989-990.
2. Marshak RR. Veterinary school accreditation: on a slippery slope? *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2011;239:1183-1187.
3. Nelson PD. Veterinary college accreditation: setting the record straight. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2012;240:810-814.
4. Lane DM. Troubling economic landscape in rural practice (lett). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2016;248:367.
5. Eyre P. Veterinary education with career emphasis: a partnership with private, public, and corporate veterinary practice. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 1992;200:311-315.