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AAVMC 2014 Deans Conference Focuses on Progress

Deans representing 38 North American, Caribbean and European colleges of veterinary medicine addressed pressing matters in academic veterinary medicine ranging from workforce issues to student wellness and One Health during the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges' (AAVMC) annual Deans Conference in Naples, Florida January 17-18, 2014.

Workforce Issues

The conference opened with an update from Dr. Link Wellborn, chair of the AVMA's Veterinary Economics Strategy Committee, and Dr. Michael Dicks, director of the AVMA's Veterinary Economics Division. Dr. Dicks outlined the range and complexity of factors affecting supply and demand in the profession. He said the current excess capacity, estimated to be 12.5% in a recent AVMA workforce study, is due primarily to the recent economic downturn and other realities associated with the demand for veterinary services. The number of veterinarians being trained, representing the supply side of the equation, has played a relatively insignificant role in creating the current workforce climate.

Dr. Dicks suggested that income distribution patterns may be creating a new under-served class of pet-owners earning less than \$50,000 a year who are priced out of the market for much of the sophisticated diagnostic and therapeutic aspects of modern clinical care. He suggested the profession might consider focusing on providing different levels of clinical support for this emerging market.

Sustainability in Veterinary Education

Sustainability in veterinary medical education, including debt-to-income ratio, job opportunities, and financial literacy among veterinary students was also addressed. Dr. Phillip Nelson presented an overview of strategies for enhancing financial literacy among students. Dr. Deborah Kochevar and Mr. Jeff Douglas, AAVMC senior communications consultant, discussed communication strategies and the importance of informing students, pre-veterinary students and the profession about the issues.

Deans were also briefed on a new web-based financial literacy and professional development program recently introduced by Zoetis that seeks to provide co-curricular support for veterinary students. The AAVMC Board of Directors has agreed to partner with Zoetis on this project and deans were asked to encourage faculty to investigate the website and report on their perceptions of its quality and usefulness.

AAVMC 50th Anniversary

Deans were also briefed on the establishment and progress of an AAVMC 50th Anniversary Celebration Committee, led by Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine Dean Ralph Richardson. That group is planning a series of activities designed to observe the AAVMC's "golden anniversary," which will be observed from March 2015 – March 2016.

One Health Initiatives

Dr. Joan Hendricks and Dr. Trevor Ames led a discussion on One Health initiatives focused on communicating the vital role veterinary medicine plays in human health and well-being, integrating with other health professions and measuring outcomes. The group agreed that One Health is broader than just comparative medicine and zoonotic infectious disease control and suggested that key advocates need to be identified and cultivated in human medicine. The group acknowledged the importance and timeliness of the upcoming AAVMC meeting focused on One Health and stressed the need to demonstrate the value of one health through actions and accomplishments before attempting to broadly communicate the concept.

Student Wellness

Dr. Lonnie King highlighted results from a recent Student Wellness symposium presented at The Ohio State University. Mental health and wellness is a major issue across many sectors of society, but disturbing data suggests the suicide rate is higher among veterinarians than the rest of the population. Curricular challenges, economics issues and self-esteem issues were discussed as factors affecting rates of anxiety and depression among the student population. Faculty members need to be educated about these conditions, though their role as counseling agents is limited. Several schools are now employing full-time career and clinical counselors.

International Experiences for Students

Dr. Paul Lunn led a discussion on international experiences and opportunities in the developing world. Discussions centered on the value of creating broader awareness about veterinary medical contributions in non-clinical areas, the importance of focusing on strategically considered initiatives as opposed to "veterinary medical tourism" and the career development benefits of international experiences for students.