



Creating a Vision for Academic Veterinary Medicine An Introduction to Long Range Planning by the AAVMC

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The beautiful iconic sculpture, *The Gentle Doctor*, located at Iowa State University is a wonderful characterization of the veterinary profession as we know it today. *The Gentle Doctor*, which represents an emphasis on companion animal medicine, stands before a mosaic representing the profession's rich history. Today, in fact, *The Gentle Doctor* has become a stereotype for our entire profession. But consider this: Iowa State's Artist in Residence, Christian Peterson, created *The Gentle Doctor* in 1937. In contrast to veterinary medicine's principal work at the time, which focused on diseases and disease prevention in large animal species, he recognized a more humane and compassionate role for veterinarians in their care for companion animals. Companion animal medicine was most certainly not the primary emphasis of the veterinary medical profession in 1937. The first exclusive small animal practices didn't open in Christian Peterson's home state of Iowa until the early 1950s. *The Gentle Doctor* was a visionary depiction of what was to become one of the profession's widely recognized principal activities, preceding its onset by twenty years.



What would Christian Peterson create if he were to depict our profession in 2025? Peterson saw something already at hand – veterinarians' humaneness and compassion, which he illustrated in *The Gentle Doctor*. In the process, he created a vision that now characterizes many professionals. Can we detect trends or seeds in our current activities and create a vision for the profession, and more specifically, academic veterinary medicine, in 2015 to 2025? Perhaps what we envision will be no different than today's world. Perhaps it will be more varied and broadly depicted. Given a vision, however, what changes will be required in academic veterinary medicine to ensure its realization?

Societal demand for veterinary services ultimately drives the nature and content of our curricula. The development of exclusively small animal practices in the mid-twentieth century preceded the shift to an emphasis on that subject in our curricula. Today, academia is faced with a myriad of challenges, many of which are driven by societal expectations and needs for veterinarians and they require our immediate attention. The most pressing challenges relate to the resolution of immediate workforce shortages. Veterinarians are desperately needed in biomedical research and the full array of careers in public practice. Schools and colleges of veterinary medicine are addressing these needs; at the same time, the demand for small animal or companion animal service is not lessening. In fact it is intensifying, with an ever greater need for specialization. Expectations for food supply veterinarians are rapidly changing with new roles being defined and some traditional roles being unfilled. Unfortunately, the academic community often finds itself reacting to difficult issues rather than having

anticipated the needs and making strategic adjustments in advance. Some indications for the current needs in public practice were forecast in the “Future Directions for Veterinary Medicine,” developed in the PEW National Veterinary Education Program, published in 1989. If we had developed a more clear vision sooner it’s likely that veterinary academia would have been better prepared for the changes needed today, and there would be an easier transition to meet these challenges.



Interestingly, the 1989 PEW report contains the notion that a periodic review of veterinary education based on external forces having impact on the profession, ought to be instituted. The Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges has engaged in an effort to assess the future. At this time, we pose these questions: What is the vision to characterize veterinary medicine in 2015 or 2025? And more specifically, what is the vision for academic veterinary medicine in 10 to 15 years hence? Our answers may not be as accurate as Christian Peterson was with his visionary depiction of the profession. But if we examine external forces that influence trends and activities in our profession, just as he recognized basic elements of the profession already in existence during his time, we may be able to envision future characteristics and set in motion those elements of academic reform that will be necessary to meet societal expectations and demands of tomorrow. Thus we strive to bring the full advantage of veterinary science to mankind.

The AAVMC has engaged a professional group to conduct Foresight Analysis, a highly structured and sophisticated process, which involves stakeholders of our profession and, in consideration of existing trends, to determine multiple, plausible future scenarios. These scenarios of the future will lead to conclusions and recommendations to guide the strategic planning of veterinary academic institutions as they prepare curricula to enable veterinarians to meet tomorrow’s challenges. The analysis, “Envisioning the Future of Academic Veterinary Medicine,” will guide us for the next 5 to 25 years time horizon.

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