

## Extension and the Practicing Veterinarian

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In order for Extension programs of veterinary medicine to succeed, good relationships are needed among university veterinarians, practicing local veterinarians, county Extension agents and the clientele. This author attempts to define some roles and relationships and offer some suggestions for improvement of relationships to increase effectiveness of the Extension educational programs.

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Veterinary medical extension education is an important part of Extension programming. Needed education and change provide a constant challenge to Extension agents and veterinarians. A good relationship is needed among university extension, practicing veterinarians, county Extension agents, and clientele.

### Continuing Education and Change

Alvin Toffler, in *Future Shock*, says, "scientific and technical literature mounts at a rate of some 60,000,000 pages a year," making it impossible for anyone to "keep up" with all of the scientific and technical information published.<sup>1</sup>

However, it's not merely a question of volume; it's also the rapidity of change, the swift ob-

solescence of knowledge, that is creating a need for new ways of coping with a changing reality. As Toffler indicates, "In our social setting, knowledge is change—and accelerating knowledge-acquisition means accelerating change."<sup>2</sup>

If people aren't to be left behind by this swift and relentless change, they must prepare themselves for the future through education. Education must be redefined; acquiring a body of knowledge in early childhood and youth is no longer enough. Rather, education must be future-oriented, preparing men to accept change. Education must become a continual process that begins at birth and ends only with death.

### Impact of Change

The human population explosion and the resulting need

for increased food production will place increasing demands on veterinarians and veterinary medicine in the decades ahead.

In many developing countries, the burden of disease costs up to 50 percent or more of the potential total animal production. Even in the U.S., annual losses from livestock diseases amount to an estimated 15 percent of the potential total yield.

The veterinarian is responsible in a large measure for the wholesomeness of milk, meat, and eggs and the health of the herds and flocks that produce them. Changes in agricultural production and the increased volume of scientific information will greatly affect the practice of the veterinarian and the application of veterinary medical knowledge by animal owners and managers.

In addition to the need for additional veterinarians, there will be a continual demand for retraining of practicing veterinarians as well as for dissemination of new, current, and practical knowledge relating to veterinary medicine.

As the number of farms and ranches continues to drop and the size continues to increase, the profit-minded livestock industry will become more specialized and will need more specialist advice, more precise accounting procedures, and more efficient programming tools.

For the veterinarian, there should be new opportunities in cooperative planning and con-

sultation on subjects like herd health, genetics, nutrition, immunization, sanitation, and preventive medicine. For the livestock and poultry producer, more sophisticated methods of diagnosis, problem identification, treatment, and prevention of livestock diseases will be needed to solve existing problems created by volume production, increased animal density, mechanization, labor problems, and other factors.

In addition, areas such as consumer education, public health, environmental pollution, 4-H youth programs, laboratory animal medicine, recreational and pet animal management, and others will require the attention of veterinary medicine specialists.

### **Veterinary Medicine Profession**

Blauch says that the professional is sustained by the satisfaction of serving well, gaining the esteem of his fellow professionals, and living up to the solidly established tradition of the little society or professional group he's a member of.<sup>3</sup>

Because of these characteristics, veterinarians form professional organizations, not only to improve their public image, but to increase their knowledge and skills. These professional organizations set standards for performance, including legislation and codes of ethical conduct. Like most professions, veterinarians are

alert to protecting the public from the practice of those who haven't attained acceptable standards or who disregard them.

### **University's Role**

The primary role of the university, through its Extension personnel and programs, is to acquaint practicing veterinarians, producers, and consumers with current research advances.

The Extension veterinarian develops education (Extension) programs to transmit information from the veterinary faculty and other sources to county Extension agents, veterinary practitioners, industry, livestock producers, companion animal owners, and the public. Research and teaching faculty members serve as a resource for specialized knowledge and help organize and participate in continuing education programs.

As educators, they're guided by the principles of educational philosophy and practice. As members of a profession, university veterinarians are guided by the Code of Ethics of the American Veterinary Medical Association and their state and local veterinary organizations.

### **County Extension Agent's Role**

County Extension agents and local veterinarians are trusted sources of information in a community. The agent is the univer-

sity's representative in the local community and has direct and frequent contact with the clientele. He's in a position to evaluate needs and organize educational programs in cooperation with veterinarians and clientele of the area.

To best do this, a good working relationship must exist between the agent and the local veterinarian. However, this is sometimes a weak point in the educational chain. Feelings of intrusion and/or competition may develop, inhibiting a good working relationship. Agents and local veterinarians must understand each other and their respective roles and work together toward effective communication and programming.

### **Veterinarian's Role**

The local veterinarian is also a part of an educational process. Much of what's done about animal health in a community reflects the techniques, methods, and attitudes of the local veterinarian. He's trusted and copied; he's the innovator in a community. Therefore, he's a valuable educational resource.

The local veterinarian has a responsibility to his clients, those who use him regularly. If another veterinarian comes into one of his herds as a consultant, such as the Extension veterinarian, he wants to know about it. In the same way, an agent wants to know when a state specialist

comes into a county and visits a herd. Also, the veterinarian feels that most information on animal health should originate from the veterinary profession.

### The Client

The client is involved in a very competitive society. He's used to shopping for the best prices and dealing with salesmen and dealers. Also, in the cost-price squeeze, he's motivated to "do-it-yourself" whenever feasible and is often looking for "free" advice. This leads him to the county agent who's a recognized reliable source of all kinds of information.

The agent's advice often results in the sale of a product for private business and thus isn't competitive. However, the agent may be placed in "competition" with the veterinarian who's selling advice and knowledge in the form of diagnosis and treatment. Thus, the agent can end up in the middle—between the client and his veterinarian.

The client will often rationalize about his problems, and project his own feelings of mismanagement on others. For example, he may say that he called in his veterinarian but it didn't help because the animal still died.

However, the client may neglect to mention that the animal was almost dead before he called and he'd tried several different remedies before calling the vet-

erinarian. Also, clients often criticize their veterinarians when they can't pay their veterinary bills. Under these and other circumstances, they switch veterinarians or go to other sources for help.

### Suggestions and Comments for Improving Relationships

- If the Extension animal health program is to work, the Extension veterinarian must establish credence and provide leadership for the rest of the Extension network. He must supply Extension agents and local veterinarians with information, program materials, and quality continuing education opportunities.
- There should be a close personal relationship among the Extension veterinarian, the county agent, and local veterinarians. Each member of the chain of information should be consulted or informed. Lack of communication causes most problems.
- Extension agents and Extension veterinarians should involve practicing veterinarians in problem identification and program development to meet educational needs.
- Local veterinarians should consult with the Extension agent on local problems, aid in program development, and attend and participate in Extension educational programs.

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- Economics and advertising encourage clients to do much of their animal health work themselves. However, their ability varies from one individual to another. Unfortunately, many producers don't recognize the limits of their ability nor understand when to seek professional help. Generally, Extension veterinarians and agents need to encourage seeking the advice of a practicing veterinarian or diagnostic laboratory.
- Recommending the use of a diagnostic laboratory is a way of getting the client and his veterinarian together since the client's veterinarian must be listed and a report made to him.
- An urgent need and a real opportunity for animal health Extension programs exists. County agents can and should participate in animal health promotion. They should place emphasis on the prevention of diseases rather than diagnosis and treatment.
- The local veterinarian will probably object to a county agent posing as an animal health expert that encourages people to come to him for advice on animal health matters. This can be overcome by directing clients to their veterinarians for additional advice and quoting veterinary sources of information, such as the Extension veterinarian. This won't decrease the amount of credit or prestige of the county agent, but will make the material more authoritative, and will protect relationships.
- In seeking additional disease problem-solving assistance from a university, the Extension agent and veterinarian may work cooperatively with the client.
- County agents can work effectively in animal health programming, in harmony with the veterinary profession and its code of ethics. In fact, the combined efforts of both working together in a county program leads to the most meaningful results; a true professional will respect another professional and can be a valuable supporter.

#### Footnotes

1. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York, New York: Random House, 1970).
2. *Ibid.*
3. Lloyd E. Blauch, "Education for Professionals" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Health, Education and Welfare, 1955).

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