



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Hello, everybody. This is Bonnie Bragdon. Welcome to our webinar today. Lets go ahead and get started. Again, my name is Bonnie Bragdon and I am the organizer and host of the meeting. I will be moderating. We would like to ask for your patience in advance. This is a small group of volunteers who have put together this webinar and there may be some technical glitches as we go through, so I am apologizing in advance.

We are here today to discuss issues surrounding controversy in the current system for accrediting veterinary schools. We will get started by discussing a few housekeeping items and getting those out of the way. We will then move into an interview with Dr. Bob Marshak and he will be able to give us his insight into the issues. We have also dedicated a large amount of time to questions and answers to give you plenty of opportunities to keep involved.



My name is Bonnie Bragdon. I am the organizer and a veterinarian. I graduated from Ohio State University in 1999. I practiced for approximately ten years before leaving practice to enter a career in industry. Most recently, I left industry to start my own business and now I am the owner of a small animal health care company. I am also here to help folks understand the issues in the current system of veterinary accreditation.

We have [Dr. Bob Marshak](#) with us today. Dr. Marshak was a veterinary student at Cornell University. He then moved into practice in Vermont, where he practiced dairy medicine for eleven years. Dr. Marshak will be here to discuss his opinions and his insight into the current problem in veterinary accreditation. So, again, thank you for your patience with our technical errors. Dr. Marshak and I organized this event and we are advocating for transparency in our profession. We wanted to commit to you as a group that we also will be transparent. We are open to any questions and I will attempt, as the moderator, to give fair balance to all questions, both dissenting and in agreement. We are here to provide some information and we encourage passion in our discussion. We will attempt to unmute folks in order to have good dialogue. If we have any issues or problems we may have to mute everybody. I will be attempting to track questions as we go through, so if you can enter those questions in the comment box that will help me in ensuring everybody has a chance to make comments and questions. We do ask that you keep those comments short and brief and if we feel like somebody is going a little bit too long, we may ask you respectfully to move on.

It was really important for me as Dr. Marshak and I were organizing this that we take a quick look at why we are here today. These issues can be very complex. For me, as I was learning about them, they were somewhat convoluted and overwhelming. We know to get out and we know how to respond. We were happy to dedicate our time. We even took time away essentially from our family and some of their needs. But I would argue that personally it has been very hard for me to make the same response for our professional issues.

So, as you see here, in the last six months as I have been engaging myself more in this discussion, I found a large number of veterinarians who have been discussing these issues for a very long time. We have VIN. There is plenty of information on VIN about these issues over the last five years. Carl Darby had started a website: Save the Veterinary Profession. He has attempted to bring to light all of the issues surrounding accreditation of foreign colleges. We have Ryan Gates and Eden Meyers, who spent hours and hours of their time putting together data so that we could all understand these issues better and they put a lot of that data on their own website. We even have other groups who are helping to spread the word, but I would just encourage you all to take the time to really understand and focus on what we need to learn in order to be a part of the conversation.

Now we will enter our discussion with Dr. Marshak and I know, Bob, you and I, we have had a number of very interesting conversations and, frankly, I spent hours reading letters and trying to understand the situation, but it wasn't until I had a personal discussion with you that I understood what your passion was and why I should care. So, if you would take a moment just to share with the group why you personally are so passionately engaged in this conversation.

**Bob Marshak:** Thank you, Bonnie. Good afternoon to everybody who is listening in and will be contributing to the webinar. To answer the question of why I care deeply, I think that I have to subject you to a very brief personal history. It is the best way for me to explain it. In the 1940s (that is when I was at veterinary school), in sharp contrast to the situation in leading medical schools, the clinical departments in veterinary schools at that time were dominated – and that included Cornell – by professors who did not really practice or teach science-based medicine as was being done in medical schools. In fact, the clinical departments were dominated by an anti-intellectual attitude in that some of the clinical professors believed that we had wasted too many years in doing our basic sciences and that it really was not necessary. Also, the clinical professors that I encountered at Cornell – and I think this was all over the country in other veterinary schools – believed that clinical research was detrimental to their teaching roles; if they started to have research



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

in their departments, the quality of teaching would go down. That was a common belief, so there was an anti-research and sort of an anti-intellectual environment, I thought, in those days.

I graduated from vet school in 1945 and during the eleven years I spent as a dairy cow practitioner, I developed a special interest in bovine metabolic diseases; in fact, I was passionate about bovine metabolic diseases and trying to understand them. I became acutely aware during the process that I had a truly shallow understanding of the chemistry and the physiology that I should have understood to be better able to deal with diseases like bovine ketosis and milk fever. I tried for a while, with very little success, to teach myself some biochemistry. I actually bought a textbook and tried to read a bit in it, but I was so busy in practice and so tired most of the time that I never got very far. But then, on the luckiest day of my life, during a farm call that I made to treat an injured filly, I had the great good fortune to meet Dr. Allan Butler. He was the owner of the filly. He was a Harvard professor who was also chief of pediatrics at the Massachusetts General Hospital, the MGH. To make a very long story short, Dr. Butler became my close friend and also a very caring mentor. He invited me to come to the MGH whenever I had time to attend lectures or seminars, to go on clinical rounds with his residents and ultimately to try my hand at research. On many occasions, I would leave my practice to one of my assistant veterinarians and I would drive to Boston with tubes of blood and biopsy samples of bovine bone and bovine parathyroid glands. Most importantly for me in my experience at the MGH, though, aside from all the great things that I thought I was doing, were the encounters with a number of distinguished physician-scientists and also learning how a great teaching hospital creates its rich intellectual atmosphere and environment and how teaching research and patient care can actually be integrated.

In 1956 (probably Dr. Butler had a hand in this) I was surprised to be invited by Penn's veterinary school to accept the position as professor and chair of medicine. I was keenly aware at that time that the school's continuing existence was very much in question, but I accepted the offer anyway, for very little money, because I was fatally attracted for three reasons: First of all, the school's immediate proximity to Penn's great medical school. It was essentially only a block away from the veterinary school, right across the road. I also accepted the offer because I knew that there were now great amounts of federal money at that time for research and training after World War II, and because of the presence at the school of an extraordinary new dean – that was Mark Allen – and several professors who welcomed my radical views, or seemingly radical views then, on clinical education. With these advantages and a few extraordinary colleagues, I was privileged to participate in a revolutionary transformation of veterinary clinical education at Penn. The transformation was characterized by the training of a remarkable cohort of young veterinarian-scientists by the introduction in our teaching hospital of laboratory-based clinical research, some of this funded by NIH, and by the development of the first full spectrum of authentic clinical specialties in veterinary medicine. None of this would have been possible if I hadn't been welcomed and had access to the medical school faculty and not only that, but also to the other four or five medical schools in Philadelphia. Whenever I needed anything, I was always welcomed and people tried to help.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** So, Bob, is it fair to say that your passion comes from the idea that for many, many years veterinary medicine was in this state of being a trade and apprenticeship-type arrangement for education and then, in the years that you were in the educational arena, that has grown from more of this apprenticeship-type educational system into the system where there is more training in the basic sciences, where we are able to go toe to toe with physicians and bring more cutting-edge discoveries into the realm of practice and that we are pushing these things forward? Is it fair to say that is where we are at, trying to maintain that system for higher education?

**Bob Marshak:** That is exactly right. That was the great opportunity that I had by being associated with a medical school to develop these kinds of programs and to make these advances. The only other thing I want to say is that having traveled the long and fascinating road that I was describing, it distresses me enormously to witness the AVMA Council on Education accrediting schools that take us all the way back to the 1940s and even earlier, to an era of low-quality science and apprentice-like training systems.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** For those people who are new to the discussion and may not have a good understanding of the system, can you explain in brief what the Council on Education does, who they are, and how they are related to the AVMA and the AAVMC.

**Bob Marshak:** The Council on Education is the accrediting body for schools of veterinary medicine and recognized as such by the United States Department of Education. The AVMA began to sponsor the Council on Education, I believe, in 1952. They have and still do provide the budgetary and staff support since that time. Very recently, though, the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges has joined the AVMA in a partnership in selecting Council of Education members. I do not know if the AAVMC shares any costs or any expenses in maintaining the COE, but each organization selects eight council members, the AVMA selects eight practitioners and the AAVMC selects eight academics. These two sponsoring organizations, I should say, parenthetically, are also joined at the hip, in a manner of



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

speaking, in approving and advocating and encouraging the accreditation of substandard schools, that is, those without teaching hospitals and who use the distributive model of clinical education and do not meet all the standards.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** And we will spend time talking about that more in detail. So, again, to understand fully what is happening currently, I think we need to touch on who regulates the Council on Education, so if you would spend just a moment in helping us to understand how the government regulates the system.

**Bob Marshak:** To be recognized by the Department of Education as the accrediting agency for veterinary schools, the COE has to comply with a number of regulations. For example, let me cite a couple of them. One of them is that the COE's policies and procedures must be widely accepted – and I stress the term “widely accepted” – by the veterinary profession. This includes educators, educational institutions, practitioners and all other sectors of the profession. Also, the Council on Education is expected to have complete autonomy and independence in its deliberations and decision-making functions and be free of any real or apparent conflicts of interest. That is the language that is being used. The Department of Education's recognition of the COE as the accrediting agency for veterinary schools is essential because unless a veterinary school is granted reasonable assurance or full accreditation by the COE, its students are not eligible for federal loan dollars.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** So, as we move through this discussion, why is it so important that we learn about these issues now? I know I have been sort of listening for the last five years. I know a lot of people have been talking. Why is it crucial to help us understand this now?

**Bob Marshak:** It is very crucial in 2014 because recognition of the Council on Education comes up for review this year; it happens every five years and this is one of those years. On December 11, the advisory committee to the Department of Education – it is called the National Advisory Committee on Institutional Quality and Integrity, and I am going to refer to it as NACIQI (that's the acronym) – will meet in Washington to hear all testimony on whether or not to recommend continued recognition of the COE as the accrediting agency. But prior to that, I think in September, NACIQI will be calling for written comments on whether or not COE policies, procedures and decisions are widely accepted – I stress widely accepted – by the profession. It is imperative, then, that when written comments are called for, veterinarians in every sector of the profession who care about the welfare and future of our profession weigh in by writing to NACIQI to ask them to withhold recognition of the COE as the accrediting agency for veterinary schools until it is given complete autonomy and independence with sponsoring organizations, the AVMA and the AAVMC. This is essential in order to free the COE of its cronyism and conflicts of interest.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** As we move forward, I understand you have very strong opinions. There are a lot of people who have very strong opinions about how these groups need to be run and how they need to be governed and how they interact, but for me, as a practitioner who has never really been in the arena of education, please help me understand how accreditation of veterinary medical schools affects the profession. I have already completed my degree and I am successful in the capacity I work now, so why is it important to all of us that accreditation be carefully examined?

**Bob Marshak:** It has, Bonnie, it has profound effects on the profession, both the present and the future of the profession. The accreditation of substandard schools, those schools that do not meet the standards, has already hurt our educational system and is hurting practitioners and will continue to hurt them more seriously in numerous ways. Let me count the ways. One, by devaluing the DVM/VMD degrees, our hard-earned degrees. Two, by encouraging the proliferation of more substandard veterinary schools because they figured out that once the AVMA council has accredited one substandard school, that they also will be accredited, so they feel secure in investing in a new school. And three, by the production of increasingly large numbers of minimally educated, entry-level graduates in what really is a finite and increasingly competitive job market. This is a situation that will have profound long-term negative effects on the economic status of practitioners in private practice but also two other things: By the ultimate loss of our standing and prestige among other health professions and in the eyes of society and, finally, by having destroyed America's status as the gold standard of veterinary medical education. It is only when there is an impenetrable firewall between the COE and its sponsoring organizations, when the selection process for COE members is rid of cronyism and conflicts of interest, that we can hope to end the accreditation of schools that do not meet the standards and to put a stop to the continued weakening of standards in order to justify retrospectively the accreditation of substandard schools.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Now I am going to actually try something a little different, Bob. I am going to interrupt for just a moment and I am going to ask a question that came from the audience. I think now is a good time. The question is that AVMA leadership seems to be very strongly adhering to the current system. They are very strong advocates of that current system. One of the members of the audience would like to know why they are such strong proponents of the current system and maybe give us insight into why there hasn't been more consideration of alternate systems.





## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

**Bob Marshak:** Well, it is very difficult to question motivations of anybody or any organization, but it certainly is something that the AVMA values very much, its ability to have the accrediting agency associated with it, to sponsor it, and you know how it is in established organizations, long established with a longstanding hierarchy and so on, to hang on to what they've got and to defend it. So, the AVMA's reaction to my attempt to start a dialogue about this issue in a paper I published in JAVMA is to circle the wagons and try to defend themselves in what they are doing and what they have been doing. It has been a very unpleasant situation because I really wanted to have a true dialogue. Instead, what I hear is that everything they are doing is right and there is nothing to criticize. Actually, they are taking a few steps in the right direction, but they are too feeble to make very much difference.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** I would like to, again, divert the conversation for just a moment. If there are any students in the audience, Bob, I would like you to help them understand what "minimally trained graduate" means to you. That is a pretty harsh word that might be upsetting for folks who just recently graduated, so can you help us understand what that means by "minimally trained graduate"?

**Bob Marshak:** There are eleven Council on Education standards that schools are supposed to meet. If they do not meet those standards, then you could call them substandard, but the AVMA will argue that every school has its own individual mission and that the reason they can selectively apply the standards to a school is because that school's mission makes it possible to justify such a thing. The reason this is a fallacious argument is that the primary mission of every veterinary school in existence is and always has been the education, the production of entry-level veterinarians who are competent, and it is the Council on Education, the accreditation process, that guarantees to the public that this is in fact the case. But since every school has that primary mission, it is fallacious to say that there is a difference in the way the standards should be applied and that includes particularly the standard for research. There is a standard that says you must have high-quality research and that standard is not at all present, is not at all satisfied, in these substandard schools. They do not have the intellectual environment for modern veterinary medical education and the only thing they really do is produce veterinarians who are minimally trained, minimally educated, through a distributive clinical system. They do not have research. They do not discover and cure new diseases. Those are the things that they lack.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Bob, again, I am kind of deviating from the program and I have started looking at questions that folks have been asking. One of the questions I see here is asking to give the audience insight into the difference between teaching clinical skills and teaching people the scientific thinking process. Obviously, if you graduated from vet school, you must be able to practice and you legally are required to be a competent practitioner – whether it is spaying a dog or neutering a cat or vaccinating – and you have to have those clinical technical skills. How can we balance that and the true need for teaching people more along the lines of the scientific thinking process and teaching people how to think. Why is that such an important part of education when there is such a demand to come out and be a strong clinical practitioner?

**Bob Marshak:** I will make two comments in relation to that question. One is that I do not believe that some of these schools really know or can assess whether or not their students have acquired the proper clinical skills because, for example, one school distributes its students to a hundred or more, probably several hundred, possible practice sites for their education or other kinds of sites for their clinical education. They have no way of monitoring those sites. It is impossible for the faculty to monitor those sites properly to know actually what the students are getting. So it is quite possible, in fact I believe it is very likely, that there is no way of knowing whether many of these students who graduate from a school of that kind have acquired the clinical skills in all the clinical disciplines that they are supposed to encounter as students. There is no possible way of doing that.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Bob, that actually takes us to another question that I have seen: We keep talking about substandard colleges that we are producing, through the current accreditation system, veterinarians that are substandard and there is challenge here in the audience on whether or not there really has been a decline in educational standards. So, if I understand correctly, given the current system, it is difficult to understand how changes have affected students. And, if I understand it right, there is some difficulty in getting information to understand how these schools are being accredited and what the outcomes are.

**Bob Marshak:** The outcome assessment issue is a very hot subject these days. I have grave doubts about the need to spend so much time at this because I think it is extremely difficult, even for the traditional schools, to assess outcomes; although they can do it, it takes a lot of faculty time and I suppose it is worth it. Anyway, the government mandates it, but I cannot see how it is possible for the substandard schools, for some of them, to possibly assess at the time of graduation how well-trained the student is, both intellectually – and that is very important – and also in terms of the technical issues, the hands-on issues that they are all supposed to have achieved.



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

**Bonnie Bragdon:** We are going to move forward in our presentation. I know this is a hot button item. It has already come up as a question. There is quite a bit of controversy around the Council on Education's role in accrediting foreign veterinary medical schools. Can you give us insight into your opinion about this?

**Bob Marshak:** I am opposed to the accreditation of foreign veterinary schools for a number of reasons. First of all, having done such a dreadful job in the accreditation of American schools, it seems to me the height of arrogance and hubris to now take on the issue of accrediting foreign schools based on the belief that in doing that you are improving them or that it has something to do with globalization. As far as accreditation of foreign schools, I do not think our Council on Education is qualified, is competent, to accredit schools that have a different culture, that have different curriculum, that speak a different language and I think it is a waste of time and energy that they ought to be spending here to improve the accreditation of American schools. I also think that for-profit schools should not be accredited, as in the case of medical school accreditation. They refuse to accredit for-profit or foreign schools and for good reason. A for-profit school's priority has to first be, of course, to satisfy the shareholders and the second priority is the education system. I do not think that is a very healthy relationship.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** As we move on through our conversation, I have been monitoring the questions and I would like to divert a little bit. We have talked about what needs to be changed and your thoughts on how these organizations need to be autonomous and independent. In response to these issues, I recommend everybody to get educated, no matter what your opinion is. It takes time to understand these issues. If you feel like you have understand the issues, Bob, what action do you plan to take? What do you recommend that veterinarians do?

**Bob Marshak:** I think that what we need to do is change the relationship between the Council on Education and its sponsoring organizations. To do that, everybody who cares for the future and welfare of the profession should inform NACIQI, when it calls for comments, that they do not accept the council's present way of carrying out its accreditation functions and urge NACIQI to recommend withholding recognition of the COE until three conditions are met. One is that the Council on Education should be given complete autonomy and independence from its sponsoring organizations, as is the case in medical school accreditation. The second is the need of a firewall that allows the COE to function and make its decisions without the influence, the presence, the participation in any form by the AVMA or the AAVMC. In order to do that, the COE must be given, as in the case of medical accreditation, its own budget, its own staff support, its own working place and its own legal counsel. Thirdly, the committee that selects Council on Education members should be qualified by background and experience to choose outstanding individuals who are free of conflicts of interest. This is not the case right now. I have been a member of the AVMA for seventy years and I have been struck by the observation that the AVMA operates by continuously recycling the same active participants from year to year and committee to committee so that they ensure that the AVMA philosophy and agenda are closely adhered to. The last thing I would say is that the composition of the council must be adjusted to include a greater proportion of members with outstanding backgrounds and experience in not only veterinary medical education, but also in industry and other areas of the profession.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Okay. So, we have reached the end and we will now open this conversation up to our participants. Mr. Michael Dicks is, if I remember correctly, an economist with the AVMA and he has some information he would like to share with us.

**Michael Dicks:** We recently completed a survey on employment in the profession. We worked with AAVMC and selected veterinarians who have been out one, five, ten and twenty-five years from graduation. One of the parts of the survey was on outcome assessments. As you go through, the two questions that we asked veterinarians are how well they felt they were prepared before they got into practice and how well they thought they were prepared after they had been in practice. Across the board, all the veterinarians who responded indicated that they were satisfied, either very satisfied or satisfied with their preparation except in the area of orthopedic surgery. All categories that were listed came from the standards, I think, that come from COE. I am not a veterinarian so I cannot respond to that. I am just trying to give you an understanding of the information.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Okay. Is there anybody else who would like to comment or ask Mr. Dicks a question? Dr. Marshak, would you like to comment?

**Bob Marshak:** Practitioners vary in many ways. There are wonderful practitioners, regardless of what school they came from, who have continued to educate themselves and feel very good about what they are doing and feel that they are in a very significant medical profession. There are other veterinarians who see a practice as just a business venture and that is a whole other story. There are, I am afraid to say, veterinarians who practice fraudulent medicine. So, I do not know what this means. I think if a veterinarian is making a good living and is well liked by his community, he or she feels



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

satisfied. But whether or not they are practicing good veterinary medicine is a whole other issue and whether or not their education has been as full as it should be, as intellectually satisfying and rich as it should be, is a whole other thing.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Mr. Dicks, was there any way to tie that level of satisfaction with their education with their financial success? Were any of those questions asked and linked?

**Michael Dicks:** Yeah, there is. I do not have that in front of me. We will be presenting that information at the summit in October. We did collect information on both income and debt. We have it by school and for all of the outcome assessments what their health situation was. There were a lot of demographics and it is a very rich survey, so there is a lot of information that goes back to that. In response to Dr. Marshak, I will just say that this type of outcome assessment is something that I am familiar with. I spent twenty-four years in university doing these same kinds of outcome assessments. Basically, what it means is that these people who are practicing veterinary medicine are satisfied with the education they got to prepare them for that practice. So, I do not know what it means beyond that. That is the way the question was framed and that is what the responses were. So, the responses that they gave were quite positive, compared to some of the other outcome assessments that I have done in the past.

**Bob Marshak:** Well, making a good living is a very satisfactory thing and for those veterinarians who are making a very good living, I am sure they are satisfied with their education. This does not in any way assess their competence or how good a practice is. But the other thing that you have not mentioned is that this is a very unhappy profession right now. If you think that it is all roses and sunshine, you have not been in touch with the practitioners whom I've been in touch with and with all the things that are written and said in different ways over the internet. This is a very unhappy profession right now that is in a recession. And, with all these minimally educated students coming out creating a surplus of veterinarians, you are talking about something that strikes me as probably necessary, the type of survey you did. But it does not explain nor takes into account how dissatisfied and unhappy so many of this profession are at the present moment with the AVMA, with the economic situation, and with the fact that there is a surplus and it is growing. It is going to be a hard future for many of them, especially the entry-level kids with their great indebtedness and their low salaries when they get out.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Bob, I am going to interrupt you for a moment. I am going to recap or try to attempt to reword a little bit what Bob is trying to say and this is what is going through my mind as well. So, we have this survey and this data, which is incredibly important and which I totally value and respect, that states there is a large number of these veterinarians who feel that they are very functional and have really gleaned a lot from their education and are now successful in contributing to society as we need them to. Where we have a deficit of information is on how we as a profession are then contributing to One Health, how we are contributing to other parts of medicine outside of practice. I know there was a question here asking if the survey focused on practitioners. Was there any kind of way in which people outside practice were also surveyed? And then, aside from their satisfaction with their education, we need to have an understanding of where our profession needs to go and how we are going to get there.

Mr. Dicks, that was a very long, complicated comment. I guess the question I have for you is if there were other veterinarians aside from practitioners surveyed and if there are there any plans to look at surveying non-veterinarians who are consumers and stakeholders of veterinary services by the AVMA.

**Michael Dicks:** The survey went out to all veterinarians, members or nonmembers of AVMA, who were one, five, ten and twenty-five years out, so it covered practicing, public, industry, every type of veterinarian. Every type of aspect that is covered on the COE standards were part of the outcome assessment. I do not have all those questions in front of me. If I had known we were going to talk about, I would have brought them down, but I do not have them. We do have lots of ideas for further research, but, as you know, we are engaged in quite a bit of research, so it will have to wait until next year. We are looking for input on the employment survey. People who took it will provide us input on what questions might help us get a handle on some of the questions you are asking.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** That is great information. Thank you for sharing that and taking the time to talk to us today. Now I have a question that I would like someone from the group to answer. I understand there has been a great deal of research that has been done – and I apologize for not being educated – back in the '80s and potentially recently in the '90s, on where the state of veterinary medicine is going. I know that there were a few studies done in the '80s if I remember correctly and I believe NAVMEC has looked at that carefully. So my question is that, since the topic gets confusing between the two different sides weighing in, how do we know where we should be headed as a profession? Can anyone give us any insight into how we can understand where the future should go, and not just get bogged down in this system versus that system? Eden, would you comment? What is your experience? I know you have done a lot of data mining. I was wondering if you had come across any information in any significance that would help guide us to understand where we are going to need to be in the next five, ten, twenty years and how we are going to get there as a profession.





## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

**Eden Meyers:** That is a really important question to ask. I think that is the key question because a lot of the complaints that we get, a lot of the concerns that we have, a lot of the distress that Dr. Marshak is seeing relates not only to are the schools doing a good job of what they are supposed to be doing but also to are the schools doing the right thing, are we as veterinarians doing what society needs us to do now because that is different now than it has been for the last thirty or fifty years. I do not like the answer. I think the answers that I turn up are very challenging to achieve. I think that we need to become real doctors and I know that comes across very disparaging and that is not how I mean it. I just do not have the skill to say it any better than that. We are tremendously undervalued as it is, but we need to be doing much more, as Dr. Marshak points out. We need to be doing much more intellectual, much more less technical stuff over the next thirty years for society. We need to be integrating information. We need to be making discoveries. We do not need to be vaccinating dogs and spaying cats, right? That is a tremendously valuable service we provide, but it can be made much more efficient and therefore require far fewer of us, which leaves the rest of us sort of at odd ends.

I think our educational system needs to change tremendously in order to start producing the sorts of creative thinkers and discoverers and developers that society is going to need us to be. We need to be looking across disciplinary lines. We need to be working not in our field but with people in other fields to bring in all of the information that is available because, let's face it, veterinary medicine is limited by a lack of funds and a lack of bodies. We are spread very thinly across the globe, so we need to be pretty smart about how we apply our human capital. Unfortunately, we need to hold the schools accountable for doing something they are not currently doing and which we have not supported them well in doing, which is requiring us to go to school longer and that is the basis of my real doctor comment. We have four years of education. Human medical doctors have a minimum of eight and frequently twelve to fifteen. There is a reason that they capture a lot more of their value monetarily than we do. I think most of us come out of school not having the skills to do the sorts of things that Dr. Marshak very properly observes that are going to be the source of our true value to society over the next thirty to fifty years.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Eden, I think that was very eloquent and I think the main point I took out of that is are we doing the right thing in education, not necessarily how well are we doing what we are currently doing. So, I am going to call on Erik Bergman. I see here that you have asked a question about how can you know whether you are satisfied with your education if you have never really been exposed to everything that it means to be a veterinarian.

**Erik Bergman:** First of all, I would like to thank you and Dr. Marshak for coordinating this discussion. I think that my question really gets to the heart of Dr. Marshak's concerns as they relate to the enforcement of the eleven standards of accreditation; in particular, being part of an institution of higher learning and having real and active research going on at the institutions that are training our future veterinarians. If you have never been exposed to an internship or a residency program, if you have never been exposed to folks who are studying and doing research and working towards a PhD, how can you possibly know whether you are satisfied with your education? I think that the biggest concern that we all should have is – and I am a practicing small animal veterinarian – are we training scientists and thinkers and researchers and practitioners or are we training tradespeople. I think it is absolutely critical that as a profession – and the AVMA in particular – we begin to realize that the eleven standards of accreditation are there for a reason. The reason they are there is to ensure that the schools and universities educating our students are complying to the standards as opposed to efforts being made to apply or massage the standards to schools that are requesting accreditation. Thank you.

**Bob Marshak:** What Erik said and the previous speaker said were right on the mark. We are entering, whether we like it or not, the molecular age of medicine. The pace of knowledge in biomedicine is growing at a rate never before even contemplated in human history. How are we going to educate our students properly if we do not have, within our schools, people who can recognize that, who show they are doing things that are related to that in research and so forth. It astonishes me that at a time when knowledge is growing at a blistering pace, the AAVMC and the AVMA believe that to be strategically aligned with the current needs of society and the profession, we need schools that do not have any of the characteristics that take into account the need for research, the need for understanding where we are going into a molecular era. It is coming and if we are not up to it, we will fall back and become a third-rate profession with a lot of people who do not really understand where we are or where we are going.

**Bonnie Bragdon:** Dr. Marshak, we are out of time. I appreciate everybody's participation today. I thank you for your patience with our technical difficulties. In my mind as an organizer, this has gone wonderfully. I appreciate everybody's interest and comments. I would like to end the presentation today with just a quick review of what you can do. If you need to hear more, there is plenty of material in the VIN archives and I am sure any of us can help you walk through that. There is also a Facebook group, which is a closed group, but as long as you are a veterinarian or some sort of allied professional, we would love to have your voice, even if it is dissenting. If you are ready to take action, you think you have had enough information and you want to maybe be more proactive, you can certainly e-mail Dr. Marshak and become a part of his e-mail list. On Facebook, we are trying to keep people current on what is happening and how we



## UNDER THE MICROSCOPE: PROFESSIONAL ISSUES IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

can move forward. We have put together a petition that will also help us express our views and opinions. You can learn about this petition by visiting [www.vetuscope.com](http://www.vetuscope.com).

I would like to end here and by playing a short clip from a YouTube video which expresses the idea that we really need to share information on this issue with everybody. It does not matter what your thoughts are, if you are supporting the current system or if you are against the current system. There are so many issues in veterinary medicine and we have a lot of strong people who are very knowledgeable and who have been working very hard to make this work for us, so we need to stand behind them, be confident in our opinion and help these folks move forward.

(YouTube video playing.)

*“At first, of course, a leader needs the guts to stand alone and look ridiculous, but what he is doing is so simple it is almost instructional. He must be easy to follow. Here comes the first follower with a pivotal role. He publicly shows everyone else how to follow. Notice how the leader greets him as an equal. It is not about the leader any more, it is about them, plural. Notice how he is calling his friends to join in. It takes guts to be the first follower. You stand out, you brave ridicule yourself. Being the first follower is an under-appreciated form of leadership. The first follower transforms a lone nut into a leader. If the leader is a flint, the first follower is the spark that makes the fire.*

*Here is the second follower, this is the turning point. It is proof the leader has done well. Now it is not a lone nut and it is not two nuts. Three is a crowd and the crowd is news. A movement must be public. Make sure the outsiders see more than just the leader. Everyone needs to see the followers because these followers emulate followers, not the leader. Eventually come two more people and then three more immediately. Now we have found momentum; this is the tipping point and now we have a movement. As more people jump in it is no longer risky. If they were on the fence before there is no reason not to join in now. They won't stand out, they won't be ridiculed and they will be part of the in crowd if they hurry.”*

**Bonnie Bragdon:** So, I hope you were able to understand the point I was making, which is that there are many key issues as a profession we need to be involved in. We all need to take the time to involve ourselves, educate ourselves and then stand behind those brave voices who are helping to make our profession better, whichever side of the fence they sit on. So, on that note, I will end the webinar today. I hope it was meaningful and productive for you. We have recorded it. It will be posted on YouTube and we will make every attempt to help you find it. Thank you for your participation!

