

Veterinary Medicine and Professionalism

by
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Throughout the past four years, rumbles in the distance could be heard proclaiming veterinary medicine and its sense of professionalism. But lately some people have started to actually wonder about why they ever wanted to start the uphill battle towards that professional degree. Two questions probably should have been asked on that first anatomy test back in the freshmen year of veterinary medicine. What is veterinary medicine? What is professionalism?

As to the question of veterinary medicine Webster states that veterinary medicine is "that branch of medicine that deals with the prevention, treatment, and care of animal diseases." At one time Webster's definition probably applied but today with more emphasis placed on ecology, conservation of natural resources, unique utilization of manpower, and the constant threat of over population and starvation, veterinary medicine no longer deals with just the "prevention, treatment, and care of animal diseases." (1) Now more than ever, the veterinarian is faced with an ecosystematic environment where living forms together with their nonliving habitats form a very complicated mechanism of survival. No longer can we sit back in

our "ice cream trucks" or back offices and just diagnose and treat animal disease.

A better definition of veterinary medicine could be stated as that branch of medicine which deals with ecological and sociological factors with which prevention, treatment and care of animal diseases will bear upon man and his society. Without a direct concern for man's surroundings, the veterinarian can place himself in the role of actually hindering man's society instead of acting as an asset.

Probably the key to solving some of our ecological problems is to realize that veterinarians are in a position to influence our environment more than any other faction of people. (2) The practitioner's shingle is and probably always will be a "carte blanche to the inner circle of civic and agricultural leaders." This calling card will enable the veterinarian to influence and direct communities in dealing with their animal populations and habitats. Once again we as professionals must want to do something about the environment. This desire must arise in between the vast amounts of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, medicine, clinical science, and social events which face the student of today.

(3) Medicine can be looked upon as both an art and a science. In our constant conquest of total assimilation of more and

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more information we must not lose track of our final goal—to produce a person capable of taking the principles involved in diagnosis and therapy of special problems and applying them to the many diversified areas of “medicine”. Our educational system must be capable of producing a person who is capable of meeting the challenge of his society and his ecological impact upon that society. Veterinary medicine has to again become a whole part and not many subdivisions. Diversification and categorization of thoughts, ideas, and disciplines can come only after one has mastered veterinary medicine as a total medicine. The graduate should not only be able to treat a cow, horse, cat or dog, but he should be ready to tackle the problems of animal waste problems and over population of dogs and cats in large metropolitan areas. The only way to cope with the total social-ecological problem is to produce a veterinarian who has a solid background in all phases of veterinary medicine.

We can now turn to the question of professionalism. Again to refer to Webster, professionalism is “The methods, manner, or spirit of an occupation that properly involves a liberal, scientific, or artistic education or its equivalent, and usually mental rather than manual labor.” Everyone who has been through the veterinary medical curriculum can attest to the mental gymnastics which every student has undertaken. Has this thought process been wasted in simple regurgitation the next day or has the material been learned so that it can be recalled at a future date? Unfortunately, many of the learning processes of today stem back into the days of grade school where parrot action and regurgitation of material was all that was required.

Today we are faced with more than just being able to regurgitate material on a quiz. A process in education which must be instilled is the process of learning. With the learning of material must also come the ability to utilize and assimilate this knowledge into a usable form. The understanding of methodology, practicality, and functionality is a must in our profession.

Professionalism today can better be stated as that understanding of a science, its potential and possibilities, and the application of basic fundamentals which will help to improve a particular part of our society. This understanding application may come by formal education or by practical experience. However the education is attained, one must not lose sight of his ultimate goal—to serve society and to provide an atmosphere where abilities and knowledge can be utilized to their utmost. Somewhere in the educational process of every student of veterinary medicine the concept of professionalism should be instilled and with these professional attitudes and judgements will come prestige and respect for today's veterinarians. Prestige will come about because of the need in a community for a person who has the ability to utilize the education he possesses. Respect, as it always has been, will continue to be earned. This respect for the profession of veterinary medicine will come about when we finally realize that our profession has and always will have a profound affect upon the social-ecological problems of man's environment.

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