

# The Veterinary Manpower Dilemma

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Since the A. D. Little report on veterinary manpower predicted a surplus of veterinarians developing in the United States over the next decade, the report has been a frequent topic of discussion wherever veterinarians or veterinary students have gathered. Various opinions on and reactions to the report have appeared in the 'Letters' section of *JAVMA* and in articles and interviews published in *JAVMA* and in *Veterinary Economics*. Such responses vary widely, but quite commonly they question whether specific variables were considered or they criticize the validity of analytical methods used. In spite of such detractors, we find that the basic methods used, the assumptions made, and the parameters considered are valid and that the report provides us with a valuable set of insights into our profession in addition to the conclusions presented.

One interesting aspect of the body of criticism encountered and of the general discussion of the report is that the study's primary conclusion is largely unchallenged. That conclusion is that there will be a sizeable surplus of veterinarians in the United States by 1990, developing throughout the 1980's. This conclusion is in agreement in fact, though not in magnitude, with conclusions reached by HEW's Bureau of Health Manpower (BHM). The BHM report projects a surplus of approximately 2,600 veterinarians in 1990 versus 8,300 in the ADL report, with the variation due primarily to a difference in projected demand. The fact remains that there is a projected surplus of veterinarians available for practice in 1990.

With this projected surplus in mind, it seems that we should now concern ourselves with how to cushion the impact of a surplus,

how to deal with the surplus, and how to (within practical limits) prevent or decrease this projected surplus. We must keep in mind that there is more at stake than maintaining acceptable salaries for veterinarians, salaries which are already below reasonable expectations for a medical professional. We must also consider the impact on those individuals who will be part of the (possibly) unemployed surplus. Although this is an unpleasant subject, it must be considered. We have learned from the law profession that trained professionals are subject to laws of supply and demand.

Solutions to a surplus of veterinarians are complex and elusive. The ADL report made five general recommendations intended to counter present trends toward an oversupply of veterinarians. Some of these recommendations are designed primarily to prevent an oversupply, others are intended to alleviate the surplus itself. The first recommendation is to take steps to increase professional and public awareness of the expected oversupply. Carrying out this recommendation would have a twofold impact. First, it would tend to discourage the least motivated of pre-veterinary students and to present the more interested students with a realistic framework of facts and expectations. Second, increased awareness of the situation is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of some of the other recommendations of the report.

The second recommendation presented is to encourage and to actively work toward regionalizing schools of veterinary medicine and toward the broadening of interstate compacts. This is a practical approach, as all census regions now have a veterinary school. The principle effect of this recommendation would be to reduce pressure for more veterinary schools. A secondary result of such a trend, depending on loan and repayment

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programs, may be to draw new graduates back to home states where veterinary shortages may exist, leading to a further decrease in demand for new schools.

The ADL report's third recommendation was to expand placement services for new graduates. The rationale of this recommendation is to match need with a resource, filling spot shortages and leading to a further reduction of demand for new veterinary schools. The question arises concerning whether shortage areas are actually recognized or not. We must concede that at least some areas that have a real need for veterinary services can not support a veterinary practice.

The fourth recommendation of the report, and the one which may be the most effective as well as the most difficult, is to alter the attitude of state and federal agencies which currently assume a continuing shortage of all veterinarians, especially of those involved in food and fiber animal practice. These agencies have encouraged veterinary schools to proliferate, to expand their student bodies, and to concentrate on preparing veterinarians for economic animal practice. This recommendation is of particular interest when we consider that in the ADL projections the 8,000+ veterinarian surplus will include 1,270 graduates from four new veterinary colleges and 4,675 graduates due to the expansion of present schools (these are the projections of the ADL team), all entering the market from 1984 through 1990 (almost 75% of the projected surplus).

The final recommendations of the report involve an expansion of postprofessional educational and training opportunities and of support for such opportunities. These recommendations are based on the finding that the profession's greatest growth potential in the next decade (and current shortage areas) is in areas that require training beyond the D.V.M. degree. These opportunities may fall within the boundaries of "traditional" veterinary medicine or they may lie in new or frequently overlooked areas of veterinary medicine involving environmental work, research outside of medicine, etc. Veterinary education uniquely qualifies us for a variety of roles in biological sciences. Implementation of this recommendation may require an alternation in the attitude and the behavior of the veterinary schools, but these

changes actually seem to be currently in progress at many schools.

Two other suggestions encountered within the profession concern reducing the number of graduates within the United States and reducing the numbers of veterinary graduates from foreign schools entering the United States job market.

The proposal of reducing the number of new graduates would seem to be possible primarily by stopping the establishment of any new veterinary schools and by cancelling any plans to expand the student bodies at currently established veterinary colleges. According to the projections of the ADL report, this would reduce the projected surplus in 1990 by nearly 75%. This may, in itself, be adequate to avert an actual surplus of veterinarians if acceptable to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). An active reduction in student bodies will definitely be challenged by the FTC on the grounds that any attempts by a professional society to limit the number of persons entering the profession constitutes a violation of federal antitrust laws. A positive aspect of this proposal is that a decrease in the student body size (or stabilizing the size of student bodies) includes the possibilities of providing more resources for the individual student and of improving student-faculty ratios. This should result in a better educational environment and experience for the student and a better teaching environment for faculty members. In other words, the primary result of a stabilized veterinary student population may well be an increased quality of veterinary education with a concurrent reduction of a veterinary surplus.

Another potentially volatile subject is that of the status of foreign veterinary graduates. In 1977, approximately 1,500 foreign graduates were employed in the United States. Estimates of Americans studying veterinary medicine outside of the U.S. range from a few hundred up to 1,200. The ADL report estimates 100 foreign graduates entering the U.S. market in 1978, rising to and stabilizing at 180 foreign graduates per year in 1985. Obviously, these numbers would constitute a significant percentage of the surplus projected for 1990 (approximately 20%). For this and other reasons, there exists an ongoing controversy about the status of foreign veterinary graduates in the U.S.

Overall, it is apparent that we need to reevaluate the current structure of our profession in order to deal effectively with the inertia that will lead to a manpower surplus. It is obvious that no single solution will emerge; instead we need to develop a multi-faceted approach to the problem. To pursue any of the restrictive proposals presented here or elsewhere will require major alterations in an institutional and bureaucratic framework that is structured for growth instead of steady

state. To pursue expansive proposals will require the creativeness and ingenuity of individuals and institutions as well as aggressive public relations and education to demonstrate the quality and the extent of our training in medicine and other biological sciences. We are challenged with a complex problem, but inherent in this challenge is the opportunity to advance and improve our profession.

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# Methods of Euthanasia

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The killing of animals is perhaps the most consistent task faced by veterinarians in all facets of the profession. In private or institutionalized practice, in almost any area of active research, in meat inspection, and in pathology and diagnostic services, one common shared activity is the actual or supervisory killing of animals. The motivations, methods, and considerations are myriad, but the process of inflicting death on a variety of living creatures is an inseparable, undeniable part of the veterinary profession.

Euthanasia is by definition<sup>3</sup> the act of inducing death, without pain, to the animal being killed. Various dictionaries add easy, quiet, and lacking anxiety to the primary criterion of a euthanasia, which is painlessness. Animals killed by and for veterinarians are variously described in the veterinary and human medical literature as being sacrificed, destroyed, terminated, slaughtered or even harvested. In companion animal practice, pets may be put down, put to sleep, or put out of their misery. Perhaps this rather vast array of terms to describe a single process may be an indication of the

reluctance of people to deal with the situation directly, completely, and honestly. The authors of this paper believe it should be repugnant for any veterinarian to condone the destruction of any animal by a method that cannot be considered humane. Because the unconscious animal cannot perceive pain, a humane death may be defined as one wherein the animal is rendered unconscious (and thus insensitive to pain) as rapidly as possible, with the least possible amount of fear and anxiety.

The task faced by veterinarians almost daily throughout their professional lives is the matter of choosing and applying a suitable method of killing a patient which has been appointed to die, usually because of a hopeless or incurable disease condition, or in order to diagnose a disease so that other animals in similar circumstances can be successfully treated. The handling of each case presented for euthanasia is made unique by the individual animal and human personalities involved.

There are many methods which may be employed to reach the same end result. The ideal method should satisfy several criteria:

1. It should be painless.
2. It should not cause undue anxiety, alarm, fear, behavior, struggling, vocal-

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