



Bellwether Magazine

Volume 1
Number 64 *Spring 2006**

Article 5

4-1-2006

Dean's Message

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dean's message

Some of the most rewarding moments of my career as an academician have been teaching enthusiastic young students the fundamentals of veterinary medicine. Equally fulfilling has been the research I've conducted, discovering new things. Many veterinarians at Penn and elsewhere are performing or supporting important research, but this aspect is much less appreciated by the general public, our clients and applicants to the School.

The widely held view of veterinarians as health-care providers for pets is certainly positive—but incomplete. Much of what veterinarians do is little understood by most people. This is not just a matter of feeling that no one loves us; it's an issue of vital importance to our profession and to the public because what veterinarians do is crucial.

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On the order of 80 percent of veterinary school graduates go into private, individual-animal practice, which does fill an important need. We face a challenge, however: The numbers of veterinarians who perform research and care for the animals that serve society must be increased. After all, these vets protect the world's food supply, which includes watching domestic and wild animals for new infectious diseases—especially those dangerous to people. We need to increase the awareness and supply of veterinarians involved in this

kind of work, to prompt people to say, “I didn't know vets did that!”

The good news is that organized veterinary medicine (in the form of the American Veterinary Medical Association [AVMA]) and academic leaders throughout North America (through the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges [AAVMC]) are designing and supporting national programs to increase funding, awareness and especially the pool of incoming veterinary students, who realize their careers can extend beyond private practice. In our increasingly urban world, the only people who fully understand the link between animals and people may be veterinarians, and we need to step up to fill the need.

There is a real sense of coalitions being built at all levels of our veterinary communities: across campus, the Commonwealth, the Northeast metropolitan area (because we partner with the Manhattan-based ASPCA in our Shelter Animal Medicine Program)—and across the nation and even the world with AAVMC initiatives. I have been more pleased than surprised at the level of support our School has from its own smart and devoted staff, students and faculty; from the University; from committed legislators; from loyal and resourceful alumni; from supportive friends of both hospitals; and from the powerful, committed and influential friends of Penn Vet who are our Overseers. Through alliances and outreach, we will achieve our goals. The challenges are difficult but the team is excellent. I look forward to celebrating success with all of you in the coming year.

—JOAN HENDRICKS, V'79, GR'80



Photo by Sabrina Louise Pierce