

**Submission
No 130**

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

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NSW Workforce Shortage of Veterinarians

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The workforce shortage of veterinarians has not happened because Australia is not graduating enough veterinarians. If today's graduates were in a position to work full time there would be no shortage of veterinarians. Today's graduate veterinarians have been accepted to veterinary school based on their academic performance instead of demonstrating their knowledge about the real veterinary industry they thought they wanted to join.

The roles veterinarians play in society continue to evolve from the person who looked after beasts of burden and transportation, oxen and horses, to today's detective seeking the origins of COVID19 and Ebola virus or caring for "fur-kids".

Along the way, society's needs have changed and veterinary training has tried to adapt. The role of companion animals has changed from dogs and cats running around the neighbourhood to "fur-kids" who attend doggie daycare centres. More people are seeking sophisticated medical and surgical care for their pets.

Humanity has been experiencing the effects of a serious "World Pandemic" that has changed the lives of most humans on this planet. The cause of this Pandemic is a Coronavirus that jumped the species barrier from animals to man. Veterinarians are at the forefront of identifying where such a disease came from and identifying other potential diseases threatening humanity.

(Refer to "Gumboro Disease", a virus that jumped from bi-valve molluscs to chickens causing severe pathology in chickens. Hendra virus has gone from bats to horses and man in recent times.)

ROLES VETERINARIANS PLAY IN SOCIETY CONTINUE CHANGING OVER TIME

A. Companion Animal Medical and Surgical Care

The veterinary profession reflects human medicine in the categories of care, namely : General Practice, Dentistry, and multiple specialist types.

Specialities include Orthopaedics, Cardiology, Neurology, Radiology, Dermatology, Oncology, etc. These highly skilled Veterinary Specialists have the same level of training as Human Specialists.

B. Roles veterinarians play in human health

1. Food Hygiene - ensuring food is fit for human consumption - working in Public Health
2. Studying Disease Transmission between animals and man. (Epidemiologists)

2. Recognising new disease threats affecting humans originating in wildlife as well as livestock. (Zoonotic diseases)
3. Military veterinarians work in research roles - biological warfare
4. Research Scientists discovering the origins of disease. Professor Peter Dougherty is a veterinarian.

C. Observations from an experienced veterinarian

1. Becoming a veterinarian is a “calling”, not a job. Animals, like people, don't require medical care just during 9 to 5 office hours. Working all hours of the day and night, seven days a week, has been expected of veterinarians in the past for relatively low financial return. Many of today's vets indicate high levels of depression and other mental disorders. There is an alarming suicide rate, especially amongst younger veterinarians. The attrition rate is unacceptably high.
2. Clients prefer to develop a personal relationship with their family doctor and their veterinarian. Working “part time” cannot provide the continuity clients seek.
3. Corporatisation of veterinary practices has improved some aspects of veterinary practice by reducing operational overheads but negatively affected employee practices. Providing opportunities for part time employment is designed to assist the vet achieve his/her Work-Life balance but occurs at the cost of client satisfaction. As a result, frustrated clients take their negative feelings out on the recent graduate. These graduates can become depressed, so much so they leave the profession short staffed.
4. For large international companies such as Mars to be interested in corporatising veterinary practices, there must be money to be made for shareholders. Some of those profits need to be redirected to provide Internships and Residencies for their staff. Corporations must look for those who wish full time employment, including after hours emergency work. They may find if they paid the same wages and benefits human residents receive, males and females may again consider the veterinary profession as a viable option.

No matter what the Veterinary Schools say about their graduates being “Clinically ready upon graduation” they are not. A Veterinary Degree is a prerequisite, providing the underpinning knowledge for the beginning of an Apprenticeship (Internship/Residency in

human medical terms). Practising veterinarians are not all equal when it comes to training newly minted veterinarians.

Proposed Solutions

1. Review the selection protocol for veterinary student applicants. An appreciation of the realities of the job is essential. Experienced veterinary practitioners need to be on selection panels for choosing who becomes a veterinarian.
2. Seek students who see becoming a veterinarian a calling not a job because they like animals.
3. Provide a course for all prospective vet students, to be taken as part of their undergraduate program called, "Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine" where the students are introduced to the many professional opportunities available to veterinarians, nationally and internationally.
4. Develop Internship/Residency Programs for new graduates run through large hospitals with decent caseloads. Smaller hospitals with large caseloads are also feasible. Veterinary clinicians can only learn by hands on practice under close supervision. It takes time and case numbers to develop the required skills.
5. Train veterinarians in practices to be proper mentors. "Train the trainer" program (TAFE has a good 2 day program on the shelf). Possessing a skill does not mean you can transfer that skill to a recent graduate. Some people can and some can't train others.
6. Explore what Medicare for animals would look like. Too often those who benefit most from the companionship of a dog or cat or budgie cannot afford proper veterinary care. Recent graduates find dealing with clients who complain about the high cost of their service very depressing. Corporate policies prevent recent graduates from choosing less costly solutions for financially embarrassed clients.
7. Examine the feasibility of a mandatory registration fee that includes an insurance policy for that animal. If every pet owner purchased an insurance policy the price per policy would be decreased.

Research Opportunities:

1. The impact of the feminisation of the veterinary profession
2. The future of the "One Medicine" movement nationally and internationally and its impact on the veterinary profession.

3. Ways to provide funding assistance for animal medical care similar to that provided for human healthcare. Examples should not be limited to pet insurance and Medicare for animals.
4. The impact of Artificial Intelligence on training veterinarians.

**Professor Calvin Schwabe developed such a course at the University of California in the mid 1960's. Dr Schwabe, a veterinarian, is known as the "Father of Epidemiology".