

**Submission
No 142**

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

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To The Parliamentary Committee,

I have a genuine concern for the lack of veterinarians entering the equine sector as well early exit from the industry.

I have been involved in the employment of seasonal and resident veterinarians on a large rural Thoroughbred stud farm for the past five years. During that period, I have only managed to employ one veterinarian that graduated from an Australian University out of nine employees despite multiple job advertisements on the well-known veterinary employment websites.

In my opinion there is not one easy to identify reason for the shortage, but rather multifactorial issues that need to be discussed further.

Obvious areas of concern I have are outlined below:

At the university level:

- Reviewing the veterinary student selection process to potentially be less bias towards academic accolades and ensuring candidates have attributes that favour sustainability as an equine veterinarian.
- Potentially addressing the academic bias the faculty may have versus 'in practice' viewpoints which may be projected to the students possibly influencing their enthusiasm to move into the equine sector.
- Vets in clinical practice being mentors to not only veterinary graduates but also to veterinary students. The AVA initiative in my opinion is excellent but it should be extended and supported further throughout the equine veterinary industry.
- Providing students with more techniques to prevent burn out, improve client relations and work life balance.
- Re-educating students that 'gold standard' in lots of clinical situations is not realistic and the 'spectrum of care' model is more important in general practice. School children from an early age are taught there is a wrong and right answer and as most veterinary students must be high achieving to get a place at veterinary schools, they are particularly conditioned to excel in finding the correct answer. In practice, many things can limit the ability of the veterinarian to achieve this. The client's budget, complex cases, limited diagnostics or support being some reasons. This can be very hard to accept with our conditioned mindsets and therefore maybe the examination process should also be reviewed to prevent this.

At the Internship level:

Standardised and structured internships are incredibly important and in my opinion are a mainstay for upskilling and retaining equine veterinarians. I have heard many stories of new or recent graduates being enthusiastic enough to do an equine internship but leaving the equine sector following the internship. Internship candidates should put in hard work and in return be provided a well-rounded learning experience in a supportive environment. I had an incredibly invaluable internship experience and always highly recommend it to students that see practice with me. Unfortunately, this is not the experience for many.

At the veterinary practice level:

- Encouraging a supportive work environment:
 - Employers need to be open to flexible working hours and part time roles.
 - Being made to feel valued by clients and colleagues.
 - Being taught in practice by senior veterinarians and nurses.
 - Team building exercises within practices to improve practice moral.
 - Being supported during incidents of client relations conflicts.
- Good remuneration for vets and nurses: hourly rate; paid for being 'on call', along with days off in lieu, enhanced maternity packages.
- Loneliness is a real issue for young vets. Assisting integration with the wider community, especially as most new graduates move away from their home or university towns for their first jobs. This can be as simple as ensuring they have enough time to join a team in the evenings.
- Ensuring people have a realistic work schedule for the day and they are not expected to finish very late, at the furthest client from the practice.

At the client level:

- Clients should be educated that with the increasing expectations of the standard of veterinary care comes increased costs associated with diagnostics, upskilling of staff with longer treatment times.
- Educating clients to be aware that verbal abuse to veterinarians, nurses or practice staff is not acceptable.

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