

AVMA Delegates Report: 2024 Convention Notes

Dr. Matt Boyle and I just returned from the summer AVMA House of Delegates Convention in Denver, CO. It was Dr. Boyle's last meeting as a delegate, and I would like to start by taking this opportunity to thank him for his eight years of service in this role. Stepping into the alternate delegate role is Dr. Scott Dee. Dr. Dee is a veterinary microbiologist with experience in practice, academia and industry. His research efforts have focused on swine herd biosecurity.

There is always a lot of information to bring back from these meetings, but I think what will be of greatest interest to our constituents is the passing of Resolution 10: Safeguarding Care for Animals with Veterinarian-Led Teams. I have the resolution printed in full below to read.

I would like to provide some background on why the delegates thought it important for the AVMA to make a strong statement on keeping animal care decisions in the hands of veterinarians.

With the current workforce shortages, some states are beginning to pass legislation allowing non-veterinarians to expand their scope of practice. For example In Arkansas, recently adopted Act 161, allows Veterinary Technician Specialists (VTS) to establish a temporary VCPR (which must be completed by a veterinarian though an in-person visit within 15 days), order diagnostics, provide a diagnosis or prognosis, and establish a treatment plan (they may not prescribe), and perform minor dental and surgical procedures (not including abdominal, thoracic, orthopedic or neurologic surgeries). Under Arkansas Act 161, the licensed veterinarian that is using, supervising or employing a VTS is responsible and liable for their performance.

A VTS is veterinary technician that has advanced training, and has passed a certification exam in their chosen discipline (critical care, internal medicine etc.)

The AVMA is in support of technicians and VTS's working to the top of their degree, and in fact, believes that utilizing support staff to their fullest degree is the best and most practical way of managing the current work-force shortage. However, this new legislation has gone too far by inappropriately expanding the VTS's scope of practice beyond their education and training,

The AVMA and Arkansas VMA lobbied hard to prevent this bill from passing. Although they were unsuccessful in stopping the bill, they were able to make some significant changes to the original bill, including removing language that says that a VTS may be independently compensated for their services (keeping compensation only through the veterinarian or practice by which they are employed), preventing a VTS from being allowed to prescribe (which would be in conflict with federal prescribing laws) and insisting that abdominal, thoracic, orthopedic and neurologic surgeries were specifically identified as being out of scope.

Monitoring, and lobbying against legislation that is harmful to veterinarians and animals is a large part of what the AVMA does for you as a practitioner. I want to put in an ask here for all veterinarians who have not donated to the AVMA PAC to please do so now. The PAC is non-

partisan and the funds you give allows the AVMA to make campaign donations to our representatives which in turn allows us to have access to them. Only 2% of veterinarians donate to the PAC and it is really important for us to have the funds to continue our lobbying efforts.

Continuing on the theme of workforce shortages, another huge value that the AVMA provides is that it collects data to help with making fact driven recommendations for how our profession should tackle the big issues that are currently facing us.

One current concern is that many practices are having a hard time finding veterinarians. However, the AVMA has identified that some circulating estimates for workforce needs substantially overestimate demand and underestimate supply for companion animal veterinarians. Here is some data:

- Between 2022 and 2030, the number of veterinarians providing services for companion animals will grow by more than 20%, from about 80,000 to more than 98,000
- Increased class sizes, as well as three new veterinary schools graduating their first classes in 2023, 2024, and 2025 contribute to this.
- The 20% increase does NOT include even further increases in veterinarian numbers that will come about by the 10 new veterinary schools that are in various stages of development and the fact that existing veterinary schools may further increase their class size.
- The AVMA projects that we have enough companion animal veterinarians to fill demand, even if existing veterinarians elect to decrease their work hours.

There are still significant shortages in rural America and in certain segments of veterinary medicine, such as food animal, equine, academia, shelters, emergency practices, specialties, and public health. This is where the work needs to be targeted in terms of tackling the current work-force problems.

From Dr. Lori Teller, immediate past president of the AVMA: "Retaining the individuals currently working in the profession is key, as is identifying what attracts veterinarians to the profession's various roles in the first place. Simply increasing the number of veterinarians, creating a mid-level position, and/or relaxing the VCPR isn't the answer."

I would like to invite everyone that would like more information about our work-force shortage, or information regarding the concept of a mid-level practitioner to read "Straight talk about veterinary workforce issues" by Dr. Teller, available on the AVMA website.

Although there isn't room for me to highlight everything that the AVMA is working on, I do want to provide a summary of the Veterinary Information Forum (VIF) topics that we asked Minnesota veterinarians to weigh in on.

Spectrum of Care: The Why and Barriers to Implementation.

In general, our Minnesota constituents felt that providing a spectrum of care to clients was important, and noted that new graduates may have the hardest time with offering spectrum of care.

Work that we would like the AVMA to focus on in the upcoming years is:

- Additional Investigation (into barriers to providing spectrum of care)
- Collaboration with stakeholders (including AVMA Trusts, State VMA's, American Association of Veterinary State Boards, American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges)
- Scoping potential research needs
- Consideration of development of policy or position statements
- Member resource development (Spectrum of Care Toolkit).

Sustainability in Veterinary Medicine: The Greening of Veterinary Workplaces.

In general, Minnesota veterinarians felt that sustainability was very important to them and are trying to implement sustainable practices in their clinics currently.

Work that we would like the AVMA to focus on in the upcoming years is:

- Develop a best practice list for individual practice owners with regards to sustainable efforts and resources for the clinical practice setting.
- Explore collaboration with other One Health Stakeholders with regards to sustainability, including the supply chain
- Explore development of educational resources and potential Sustainable Practices Certification.
- Review of internal processes and systems with the goal of increasing sustainability within the AVMA
- And explore collaboration with academic institutions with regard to increasing sustainability efforts in veterinary education

One last thing I would like to highlight is the Presidential Advisory Council on Combating Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria. The AVMA is working closely with this group as antimicrobial resistance and infectious disease is at the forefront of our minds. Established in 2015, The PACCARB is a federal advisory council that provides advice, information, and recommendations on all things related to antimicrobial resistance. One of the big projects they are working on is preparing for the next pandemic using a One Health model.

Below for your reference is the full verbiage of Resolution 10, as well as the other Resolutions that the delegation discussed during our assembly.

Full Verbiage: Resolution 10—Safeguarding Care for Animals with Veterinarian-Led Teams

Animals deserve safe, efficacious, and high-quality care, and animal owners should be able to fully trust the veterinary services provided for them. Accordingly, the AVMA will vigorously defend the practice of veterinary medicine—which includes the ability to diagnose, prognose, develop treatment plans, prescribe, and/or perform surgery—against scope of practice expansions by non-veterinarians that threaten patient health and safety, the safety of animal products, and/or public health. Veterinary healthcare is enhanced through efficient utilization of each member of the team through appropriate delegation of tasks and responsibilities by the veterinarian.”

All resolutions discussed and their outcomes

Resolution 10—Safeguarding Care for Animals with Veterinarian-Led Teams: This resolution passed with some minor changes.

Resolution 11—Supersede Policy on Canine Devocalization. This resolution strengthens the language against debarking. This resolution passed.

Resolution 12—Revised Policy on Docking of Lambs’ Tails. This resolution states that lambs tails may be docked for cleanliness and to minimize fly strike, but opposes excessively short tail docking. This resolution passed with some minor changes.

Resolution 13—Revised Policy on Tail Docking of Cattle. This resolution affirms AVMA’s opposition to tail docking of cattle. This resolution passed.

Resolution 14—New Policy on Sheep and Goat Castration This resolution recommends that sheep and goats be castrated as early as possible using pain medication. The delegates recommended referring this resolution back to the BOD (Board of Directors) for further work with the Animal Welfare Committee (AWC). In particular, the American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners (AASRP) would like to see a day range for castration be put into the resolution because this currently varies with producers. In addition, the resolution currently reads that there are some potential negative welfare implications associated with castration and the AASRP would like this clarified as this should not be the case if done at an appropriate age with pain management.

Resolution 15—New Policy on Sheep and Goat Disbudding and Dehorning. This resolution states that sheep and goats should be disbudded between 3-9 days of age, after 21 days of age, horn tissue is developed. The delegates recommended referring this resolution back to the BOD. The AASRP pointed out that sheep are not routinely disbudded or dehorned, and they would also like the resolution to say that disbudding of goats needs to be done before 14 days of age

Resolution 16—Revised Policy on Physical Restraint of Animals. This resolution states that appropriate restraint must be chosen based on the species and that any restraint device should be designed to ensure the safety of the animal and people involved. This resolution passed (with some minor changes).

Resolution 17—New Policy on Canine Hybrids - this resolution emphasizes that among other concerns, providing care for canine hybrids may be considered an illegal act and there is no USDA approved rabies vaccine licensed for hybrids. This resolution passed with some minor changes.

Resolution 18—Statement to the Profession: New Policy on Recruiting and Retaining Public Practice veterinarians. This resolution highlights the dire need for more veterinarians in federal agencies, including food safety veterinarians. This resolution recommends that, in part, the salary be increased for these veterinarians to match their veterinary colleagues in other sectors.

If anyone has a question, or would like to discuss these issues further, please reach out to your AVMA delegates!

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