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Call to Action: Accrediting Body for Graduate Veterinary Medical Education

Lori Teller, President
Ronald E. Gill, Chair of the Board of Directors
Janet Donlin, Executive Vice President
Gail Golab, Associate Executive Vice President and Chief Veterinary Officer
American Veterinary Medical Association
1931 North Meacham Road, Suite 100
Schaumburg, IL 60173-4360

Dear Drs. Teller, Gill, Golab, and Donlin:

The American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) Board of Regents formally requests that the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) initiate the formation of an overarching accreditation body for veterinary graduate clinical education, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Veterinary Medical Education (ACGVME), named for consistency with the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME).

The ACGME is a non-profit private council that is responsible for evaluating and accrediting all graduate medical training programs (internships, residencies, and fellowships) for physicians in the United States. In 1970, the American Medical Association House of Delegates recommended incorporation of the internship with residency programs with a goal to phase out stand-alone internships by 1975. In 1972, the Liaison Committee for Graduate Medical Education (LCGME) was established to accredit programs, and in 1981, the ACGME was formed from a consensus in the academic medical community for an independent organization. Over 40 years later, there is a crisis in the veterinary profession. We now call for an equivalent body to accredit veterinary internships, residencies, and fellowships, the ACGVME.

While individual specialty colleges (such as ACVIM), private specialty practices, and colleges of veterinary medicine have established mechanisms to oversee training program quality, there is no consistency, coordination, or oversight in this effort. Although the AVMA and AAVMC have developed guidelines for veterinary internships, there is no one body to ensure that training institutions adhere to standards. The lack of oversight within the veterinary profession is astonishing, given that standards for internship programs were set by the AMA Council on Medical Education in 1914, and an Internship Review Committee was formed in 1954 (with representatives from the AMA, American Association of Medical Colleges, American Hospital Association, and Federation of State Medical Boards).

There is an urgent need for a single organization to address the following growing and interconnected problems in veterinary specialty medicine:

1. **Lack of broad oversight to ensure consistency in the quality of intern, resident, and fellowship training programs.** Program registration and review processes differ among specialty colleges, and some specialty colleges have required training institutions to pay a residency training program (RTP) fee to support the costs of RTP oversight. Such fees have been controversial, and no one body is working to ensure such fees are reasonable.
2. **A crisis relating to intern and resident wellbeing.** This crisis resulted in the development of the Guidelines for Veterinary Intern & Resident Wellbeing by the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges; a national meeting on the topic; and efforts to encourage corporate veterinary practices, academia, and specialty colleges to adopt the Guidelines.
3. **A crisis of diversity, equity, and inclusion.** A lack of diversity among veterinary specialists exists and many veterinary specialty colleges, including our college, are expending significant resources to understand the problem and work to be more inclusive, but more support is required. The AAVMC has made great strides with their DiVersity Matters initiative, but their efforts are not focused on the veterinary specialty community as a whole. Building diverse physician workforce is a key component of the ACGME's mission and the ACGME has detailed Common Program Requirements that address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion for internships, residencies, and fellowships.
4. **A national shortage of veterinary specialists.** This stimulated the recent national Specialty Veterinary Medicine Stakeholder Summit that was attended by 33 stakeholders from privately held and corporate-owned practices, academia, industry, and specialty colleges.
5. **A mismatch between available internship graduates and residency training programs (RTPs).** Some practices that offer quality residency training programs (RTPs) face an insufficient pool of intern applicants (or complete lack of applicants). Yet every year some of the brightest and most talented intern graduates are not offered positions, despite the dire shortage of veterinary specialists.
6. **Proliferation of veterinary specialty internships.** Over the last decade, there has been a proliferation of "specialty" internship training programs in both academia and private practice. Graduating interns enter these programs because they fail to match to an RTP after completing a traditional internship; or because they choose to delay residency training for personal considerations (wellbeing, family pressures). Thus, graduates from traditional internship programs now often compete with graduates from "specialty" internship training programs (e.g., surgery internships, medicine internships) for open positions in attractive RTPs. When new graduates learn that they may need to complete a traditional internship then a second "specialty" internship to be selected into top RTPs they are further deterred from pursuing a career as a specialist.

It is not surprising that many new veterinary graduates choose not to pursue a career in specialty medicine because they face 1) insufficient salaries to repay educational debt and/or support basic costs of living; 2) excessive working hours; 3) poor quality training programs that lack structure, an appropriate caseload, equipment/facilities, support staff, research and educational opportunities; and 4) inadequate mentorship and supervision.

We urge the AVMA to engage leadership from academia, organized veterinary medicine, corporate practices, and industry to begin discussions regarding the formation and activities of a new organization, the *Accreditation Council for Graduate Veterinary Medical Education (ACGVME)*, for consistency with the Accreditation Council of Graduate Medical Education (ACGME). I welcome a meeting to discuss this request.

Warm regards



Jane E. Sykes BVSc(Hons) PhD MBA GCPH
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Chair of the ACVIM Board of Regents

Attachments:

AVMA Guidelines for Internships
AAVMC Veterinary Internship Guidelines
AAVMC Guidelines for Veterinary Intern & Resident Wellbeing (<https://www.aavmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/AAVMC-Wellbeing-InternResident-Guidelines.pdf>)
AAVMC DiVersity Matters
ACGME DEI common program requirements
Specialty Medicine Stakeholder Summit Priorities

Copy:

American Animal Hospital Association
American Association of Veterinary Clinicians
American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges
American Board of Veterinary Specialties
Specialty Veterinary Medicine Colleges Association Executives