

AVMA Presidential Remarks to HOD at Convention
Lori Teller, DVM, DABVP (canine/feline)
July 14, 2023
Denver, CO

Howdy AVMA! It has been quite an honor to serve as your president for the past year, and what a year it has been! I can sum it up in 2 words: running shoes. And I am not a runner. But it has taken running shoes—lots of them—to get through airports and from destination to destination. I thought I had experienced everything when it comes to modern air travel: flights delayed, flights cancelled, flights rerouted, flights diverted for medical emergencies... but last week, en route to the Canadian VMA meeting, I was seated by the exit, and during the safety briefing, the emergency exit door exploded. Yes, exploded. That was a new one. Running shoes have come in very handy.

Despite the trials and tribulations of traveling, when I have finally arrived at my destination, it has been **so** worth it. You know why? Because veterinarians, and the people who work with us and support us, are awesome. **YOU** are awesome! Many of you here today, as well as your colleagues at home, have gone above and beyond to provide me with wonderful hospitality, but even more importantly, allowed me the opportunity to engage with you and your members, and to really listen to your concerns and hopes. I have had the honor of traveling around

the country and around the world. And almost everywhere, veterinarians are dealing with similar opportunities and challenges with regards to workforce issues, wellbeing, workplace culture, antimicrobial stewardship, animal welfare, public health, veterinary education, access to care, DEI, and more. Less developed countries struggle with some of these issues, as well as having access to even basic medications and vaccines. And countries in war-torn areas additionally struggle not only with getting drugs and supplies, but having running water and stable electricity. There is no profession better able to work under adverse situations and to MacGyver a solution than those working in the veterinary field.

In addition to representing you at conferences and meetings, I have had the privilege of representing the AVMA before Congress and various state legislatures, in media interviews, to our students, and with our US military and NATO allies. I have had the opportunity to speak on your behalf with our stakeholders and with the general public. Much of what I have done involves educating others about the veterinary profession and correcting misperceptions and providing accurate information about EVERYTHING we are involved in.

What are some of these misperceptions and what is accurate information that you can truly believe? There is lots of misinformation, maybe even some disinformation, about workforce issues. Just like many other professions, veterinary medicine is still recovering from the pandemic, which caused some significant challenges for our workforce and our ability to deliver care efficiently. There are a lot of efforts to make changes to the profession based on that. However, COVID was an outlier, not a benchmark for long-term planning, and we should not make hasty decisions about future workforce needs based on the pandemic. The numbers that have been circulated to support claims of a shortage of veterinarians in 2030 are based on faulty math, and they substantially overstate demand and underestimate supply of **COMPANION ANIMAL** veterinarians. Currently there are approximately 80,000 companion animal veterinarians in the US. Our data project a 20% increase in the number of companion animal veterinarians by 2030. This does NOT include the additional number of graduates from **established** schools that are **increasing** class size, nor the graduates of the **TEN proposed** veterinary schools in various stages of development. There is a **long-standing** shortage of rural veterinarians, food animal and equine veterinarians, shelter veterinarians, and veterinarians in academia and some specialties. These specific shortages are caused by multiple factors and require more targeted and specific solutions. Even

if the number of veterinarians who would like to reduce the number of hours they work were to occur, we are still likely to have enough veterinarians to meet the needs of our clients, patients, and communities.

Another misperception that is permeating the profession is the need for a mid-level position. Frankly, this is premature, has not been well-thought-out, and is an answer in search of a problem. Human medicine is frequently cited as a model for a veterinary mid-level provider. The first nurse practitioner program began almost 60 years ago, and human healthcare still struggles with issues created by moving forward without standardized education, credentialing, and licensure. Recent studies have shown that that mid-level providers in human health care order more diagnostic tests and prescribe more antibiotics and opioids than their physician counterparts. Even when working at a lower salary, the costs to the patient and to 3rd party payors are higher when someone is seen by a mid-level provider. Currently there are no accurate data to support the creation of a veterinary version of a mid-level, and those who are proposing this position are either woefully misinformed or, unfortunately, have ulterior motives.

Lots of misinformation continues to circulate about telemedicine and the VCPR. We have been doing telemedicine for a very long time. And we've been doing it quite well--because it is done within a VCPR that has been established with an in-person exam. This allows us to gain information about the client and the patient to deliver the most appropriate diagnosis and effective treatment plan within the owner's resources and capabilities. Some people say that some care is better than no care. However, the wrong diagnosis or treatment plan can cause more harm than good and lead to animal suffering. This does **not** improve access to care, it delays effective treatment, and it ultimately costs the animal owner more. And, frankly, the "some care" that most animals need are vaccinations and preventive care -- which cannot be delivered via telemedicine. **That's the access to care we need to be focused on**, because appropriate preventive care is so important, and **THAT CANNOT** be delivered via telemedicine.

The AVMA has been the voice for the profession for 160 years. We continue to be **MEMBER-driven** and work to actively promote, protect, and advocate for **VETERINARIANS**, our teams, our clients, the public, and the animals entrusted to our care.

There is so much more that I have had the opportunity to do on your behalf, and it has truly been my pleasure. Veterinary medicine is an integral part of who I am, and it has been an honor to serve as the President of **the best and most respected** veterinary organization around the world, the American Veterinary Medical Association. I have stood on the shoulders of giants—special shout out to Immediate Past President and my brother from another mother, Dr. Jose Arce. I know that as I hand off the baton to Dr. Rena Carlson, the outstanding work of the AVMA will continue to flourish under her leadership and guidance. Put on your running shoes, Rena!

And for all of you, **thank you** so much for everything that you do, every day, on behalf of the veterinary profession. Because of you, there are 2 other words that sum up this past year: **AVMA ROCKS!**

Enjoy Convention!