Recap of the Report on Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation -- Jan Krehbiel

The Report of the AVMA Task Force on Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation was made public in late April and there have been follow up articles about the report in the AVMA Journal, online communications and a letter, I sent to the NOAH forum on June 11.

The members of the executive board individually reviewed the full report and collectively discussed feedback from AVMA members, the COE and the AAVMC. At our meeting in June, we looked at the pros and cons for both domestic and foreign accreditation of veterinary colleges. While we received recommendations to discontinue all requests for accrediting new schools, we felt this could be perceived as a response to the economic challenges we face and the excess capacity in the veterinary work force, as documented by the NRC and VESC work force studies.

There were concerns expressed that continued accreditation of foreign schools could lead to an overwhelming influx of foreign graduates that would compete for positions in a saturated job market in the US. Yet, the AVMA work force study report revealed that less than 7% of our work force is composed of foreign graduates and less that 1/3 of those come from foreign COE accredited schools outside the Caribbean.

Additional feedback suggesting that allowing international schools to seek accreditation and recognition according to established COE Standards, improves the quality of global veterinary education. With the growing focus on one health and the global community, now more than ever, there is need to foster international collaboration and accreditation serves a vital function in this regard.

From 1997-1999 the COE stopped considering foreign applications for Foreign Accreditation of Veterinary Schools. A Task Force reviewed the process and recommended that Foreign Accreditation continue, with the proviso that there be full cost recovery of expenses related to the accreditation process. That Task Force felt it was important that AVMA accept a leadership role in international veterinary medicine due to rapid Globalization, the potential of Emerging zoonotic diseases and Food Safety concerns.

As a part of their review the 2012 Task Force conducted a survey of currently accredited foreign veterinary schools. I will share with you some of those questions and the responses:
Question #1 -- What are the most important reasons your institution sought, or is seeking, accreditation by the AVMA COE?

To develop recognition, among foreign partners, that we are a high level education institution.

To achieve an International Benchmark.

To be seen as meeting the highest of International Standards.

Question #2 -- Do you have major concerns about the process of Accreditation or Reaccreditation?

All schools responded “No”.

Question #3 -- Apart from your own institution’s interests in veterinary school accreditation, what are your views as to the most important benefits of accreditation?

AVMA accreditation is universally recognized as the “Gold” standard for Veterinary Medical Colleges.

Engenders dialogue and continued improvement in animal health, animal welfare and public health, internationally.

Help ensure biosecurity of trade routes and import markets that impact North American borders.

Question #4 -- What additional comments, would you like to share with us regarding the accreditation process?

Control of transboundary diseases, international livestock trade and One Health issues will only be addressed if we seek to apply the highest standards to veterinary education worldwide.

Whether or not the AVMA is comfortable with the fact, for many years the world has looked to the profession and the Colleges in the US for leadership in many aspects of veterinary medicine.
There has been an overt willingness on the part of the AVMA to embrace the promotion of educational standards both within the USA as well as outside the country. The AVMA brand of excellence shines through the AVMA COE accreditation process as well as the many initiatives in which the AVMA takes special interest and leadership.

On June 25th the AAVMC endorsed the AVMA affirmation of COE’s Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation Program as follows:

“The AVMA decision to affirm the COE Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation Program will elevate global standards of Professionalism, help mitigate the dangers of pandemic disease and increase public understanding of the important role the veterinary profession plays in the world.”

Dr. Stuart Reid, Principal/Dean of the Royal Veterinary College at the University of London stated:

“The COE accreditation program is very consistent with the emerging “One World, One Health, One Medicine” concept that has been embraced by the AVMA, AAVMC and other organizations.

He continued: “We live in a completely interconnected world, in terms of communication, commerce, travel and importantly, the global production and distribution of animal and plant based foods. The economic and public health consequences of human and animal disease obviously transcend geopolitical borders. What we (UK) experienced in 2001 with the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic, speaks clearly about the value of internationally embraced standards of excellence and global collaboration in veterinary medicine.”

On June 9th the executive members of the Federal Veterinarians of Europe met with the AVMA Board of Governors. These European leaders were representatives of Veterinary Medical Associations in Germany, Spain, France and the Netherlands. They individually and collectively thanked the AVMA and the COE for their leadership in accrediting foreign veterinary schools and for efforts in establishing High Standards for Veterinary Education worldwide.
We are celebrating the 150th Anniversary of the establishment of the AVMA, and as we study the history of our profession, it is interesting to note that we owe a great deal of credit to our foreign colleagues for the early development of our profession. We look to Dr. Alexander Liautard, a Frenchman as the “Father of Organized Veterinary Medicine” in the US. Drs. James Law and Andrew Smith, founders of Cornell Veterinary College and Ontario Veterinary College respectively are graduates of Edinburgh Veterinary College in Scotland. A Dr. Hagyard, another Scot, Assisted Dr. Smith at the Ontario Veterinary College for a few years and then moved to Lexington, Kentucky. There he started an Equine Practice, and who here is not familiar with Hagyard, Davidson and McGee? These pioneers in veterinary medicine were all graduates of foreign veterinary colleges. They provided wisdom; creativity and courageous leadership that helped the Veterinary Medical Profession evolve in the United States and Canada over a century ago. Don’t we have an ethical and moral responsibility to reciprocate that cooperative spirit in the continuing evolution of Veterinary Medical Education today?

I want to acknowledge Dr. Donald Smith, Dean Emeritus of Cornell Veterinary College and dedicated historian of our profession, who provided me with some of the information I just shared with you. In addition, he pointed out to me that 18% of the deans appointed to US and Canadian veterinary colleges in the past 30 years received their veterinary degrees from foreign countries. Aren’t we a Global profession that should be involved with Veterinary Education outside our borders?

After careful and deliberate review, and consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of continuing foreign veterinary school accreditation your Executive Board concluded that the benefits clearly outweighed the risks. I referred earlier to the decision of the Task Force in 1999 that recommended a continuation of Foreign Accreditation. It was the right thing to do then, and in responsible commitment to continuing the high standards of our profession, we can take no other action but to continue Foreign Veterinary School Accreditation today. Thank you for your attention.