I first want to again thank those of you who were responsible for my election to the honored position of AVMA Vice President. I also want to thank all of the AVMA staff, especially Dr. Derrick Hall and Theresa De Carli, for all the assistance given to the students and to me during my term. This past year has continued to re-emphasize the problems and concerns and bright future of the next generation of veterinarians. Those problems and concerns would be educational debt, job uncertainty, salaries, balance of personal and private life, need for internship/residency and board certification, increasing class sizes, new veterinary colleges, AVMA relevance to students and recent graduates, and the future of AVMA and veterinary medicine. Also, they are concerned as to what AVMA is doing regarding these issues.

In addition this year has permitted me the opportunity to answer hundreds of individual questions troubling students and to seek information regarding their opinions. For example, I found it interesting when asking students their opinion regarding five and six-year programs as exist in many foreign schools, a very small percentage of those voicing an opinion were in favor of such programs here in the US. It has been especially disturbing to me to hear students state they have been informed they must obtain boards in order to be happy, successful, and practice excellent quality veterinary medicine. No one knows except the individual if becoming boarded is best for him or her. Everyone’s life is different and expecting all to become boarded is unrealistic. Many students feel if they have an interest in surgery they will never be able to do excellent surgery without boards. Excellent mentoring with excellent case load, plus continuing education courses with laboratories may exceed their needs and provide the necessary skills to practice quality case care and obtain happiness. I believe we can and should advise students and point out advantages and disadvantages, but we should not tell them what they must do regarding their additional education. There is especially the feeling by some that the profession is doomed and some students have been told by veterinarians that “if they knew then what they know now, they would not have become veterinarians.” This statement is extremely discouraging to many of the already stressed students. How many of us would make this statement? In talking with high school and pre-veterinary students regarding all our student problems, few are swayed by the concerns listed previously. How many of us would have given up our dream of becoming a veterinarian if someone would have told us such troubling information? Those of us aware of the history of veterinary medicine know this magnificent profession has faced challenges in the past and always prevailed. We have as a profession always adapted, thus preventing extinction. We need to inform students of the history so they will realize this is not the first time we have experienced difficulty. Do not assume they know the history. It is apparent there are student concerns, however, the student leadership is very capable. The future of this profession is excellent if we, the present generation, attempt to assist the next generation in not making many of the mistakes we made and save them some of the “pain” and aid in the profession becoming what we know it can.

The Student Chapters of the American Veterinary Medical Association have had some similar difficulties faced by the American Veterinary Medical Association. Those being small numbers of candidates running for some officer positions, less than an ideal number of “active” members, “competition” with other student veterinary organizations for membership and student time, some students fail to see the value of SCAVMA and do not join, and some students critical of AVMA and SCAVMA without knowing exactly what both groups do or are attempting to do. The governance structure of Student American Veterinary Medical Association (National organization representing all SCAVMA chapters) is very similar to AVMA and as an observer and questioner it appears to work very well regarding input and representation. Their House of Delegate meetings are more animated and, therefore, livelier with humor part of the process. The monthly Executive Board teleconferences aid greatly in keeping current and distributing information. The value of organized veterinary medicine direct and indirect has been presented at all school AVMA presentations to students. In addition to national concerns and problems each chapter has some,
and problems which may at first appear isolated to them but as the chapters exchange
information, most affect all and they work very well together using all solutions that have worked
in other chapters.

In addition to information regarding AVMA, discussions have also focused on generational
differences and similarities, and the significance of AVMA in the veterinary profession, not just the
members. The promotion of veterinary medicine has been described in all aspects of the
profession not just practice. The importance of skills learned to make them most employable in
their areas of interest has been discussed. The critical nature of excellent mentoring and gaining
experience following graduation has been emphasized. I made the recommendation to start
looking at the AVMA Career Center Website their first year in veterinary college and keep looking
as they progress to see what and where positions are available in areas of their current and
future interests. It has been reassuring to students to point out the diversity of opportunity within
this profession and for them to find what they love doing and not just “like.” Also, telling them if
they ever no longer love what they do to look within the profession for the passion again. This
characteristic is just one of the fantastic aspects of their profession. It has also been rewarding to
assist them when possible by providing of information regarding veterinary careers.

Although many students have visited our AVMA website it is always interesting to mention many
of the areas which may be of interest to them so they learn more about the possibilities and
encourage them to go “look.” I have been impressed with the time students spend on the internet
in areas non-related to veterinary medicine. I have attempted to get them to spend 15 minutes
per day on our website.

Many of the students have questions about how they get involved with AVMA immediately
following graduation. I have directed them to what is available but also have encouraged them to
become active locally in organized veterinary medicine organizations. I have pointed out that
information gained there will be of value as they get more involved in AVMA. I would prefer they
get involved to the extent they can, rather than over commit and have a bad experience. Plus
local involvement gives them the opportunity to meet local colleagues and aid in networking and
building the profession. When expressing their professional views I point out that not every idea
they have will be excellent or adopted by the group, but that should not be a deterrent to keep
suggesting.

It is apparent that many educational models exist to educate veterinary students and they all
work. That common denominator that exists is the student. They are motivated so we must not
take that away. They are very intelligent and we need to recognize that and treat them
accordingly in the educational process. They question much and realize by searching there may
exist the possibility of more than one method to do something. They want their personal time and
I don’t begrudge them that; I envy them. Generational changes occur. We do not have to be part
of that generation to understand and appreciate it. So as long as we help our future generations
of veterinarians as much as we can and not discourage them, the future of our profession is
bright. I truly hope the future generations find the professional/personal life balance which has
been discussed so frequently.

In summary, our profession has accomplished so much in a relatively short period of time and we
must continue to do great things.