



AVMA 2015 Report on Veterinary Employment summary

In 2011, the AVMA made a commitment to move beyond its traditional ad hoc workforce studies and establish an economics division with the charge of providing the best, unbiased estimates of the current situation in the veterinary workforce. The primary focus of this division's research is to enhance the value of the veterinary degree.

The annual **AVMA Report on Veterinary Employment** is a critical component of a continuous process and the second in a series of six annual reports in our 2015 AVMA Economic Reports series.

This summary of the **AVMA Report on Veterinary Employment** will explore the following topics:

- The rate of unemployment in the veterinary profession.
- The rate of underemployment in the veterinary profession.
- Factors contributing to unemployment and underemployment in the veterinary profession.

In March 2014, a survey was sent to all U.S. veterinarians who had graduated from a U.S. veterinary college in the past 1, 5, 10 and 25 years. The survey was distributed to 8,278 veterinarians and 1,881 responded. The purpose of the survey was to measure the rate of unemployment and underemployment in the veterinary profession, and, more importantly, to understand what factors contribute to both.

Not finding employment when it is desired is unemployment; being employed but underutilized is underemployment. While both unemployment and underemployment are components of excess capacity, there has been no measurement of these two components in the veterinary profession to date. How much unemployment and underemployment exists, as well as the factors that contribute to the existence of either, is critical information needed to develop strategies that can most effectively and efficiently improve the lifelong value of a veterinary degree.

The market for veterinarians is actually robust. Veterinary medicine enjoys a low level of unemployment of 3.19 percent (weighted) and a negative underemployment (weighted), which equates to room in the profession, all else being equal, to employ an additional 951 full-time veterinarians. This 3.19 percent level of unemployment is well below the national average of 7.4 percent for 2013, as well as the national natural rate of unemployment. The natural rate is the amount of unemployment that can be expected as a result of inefficiency in the labor markets caused by frictional or structural factors. For

example, a mismatch between the skills demanded and those available in the workforce, or the location of employment opportunities mismatched with the location of available labor.

Unemployment varies by age, gender, type of practice, veterinary college attended and region of the country. However, we find that only age, participation in an internship and/or perceived inadequacy in a number of the clinical competencies have been found to be statistically associated with an increased probability of being unemployed in the profession. Factors that were unable to statistically predict the probability of either employment or unemployment were: gender, region where respondent lives, university attended, specialty board certification, additional degrees held, health, debt level, and other technical and client-relationship skill competencies.

Underemployment refers to the difference between the number of hours that a veterinarian wishes to work weekly versus the hours actually worked. A total of 20.2 percent of respondents indicated they wish to reduce the hours they work by a mean of 12.7 hours. Only 14.3 percent of respondents indicated a desire to increase the hours they work by 12.2 more hours per week. Based on the responses from the survey and applying these percentages to the initial estimates of 100,137 active veterinarians in 2014 results in a total of -82,192 hours desired. This negative number of hours implies that more respondents wish to reduce the number of hours they work rather than increase the hours they work. However, after aligning the demographics of the sample with that of the profession, 24.7 percent of veterinarians want to work less, while 22.6 percent wish to work more. The total hours of weighted underemployment is then estimated to be -38,022 hours, equivalent to the need for the aforementioned 951 additional veterinarians.

Factors that were found to be statistically relevant to the level of underemployment include: the amount of debt and income, gender, type of practice, region of the country, participation in an internship, mobility and health.

The survey collected sufficient amounts of information about the graduates of the 28 U.S. veterinary colleges to evaluate the differences between the colleges in the areas of graduate income, employment, underemployment, clinical competencies and health. While these differences have been recognized as valid measures of the overall performance of the veterinary colleges, no statistically significant differences in these areas were identified. However, there is a strong association between graduates who chose to participate in an internship and the higher probability of being unemployed. Because there is a very large variation by college in the percent of students who participate in an internship, more research should be undertaken to identify the factors that influence a new veterinarian's decision to participate in an internship.

*The next annual report in the 2015 AVMA Economic Reports series, the **AVMA Report on Veterinary Debt and Income**, will be published in early April. If you're an AVMA member and are interested in subscribing to the report series at a reduced member rate, please visit the [AVMA Store](#). Otherwise, keep an eye on our web page, our*

social media outlets and our AVMA@Work blog for other economic updates and summaries like this one.