

Women in the field but not the upper ranks of veterinary medicine

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- The veterinary profession is now 55.4% female (AVMA 2013)
- Veterinary graduates are now 78% female.

A **leadership gap** exists in our profession. The rank and file of the veterinary workforce is more female than male. This trend began in the 1980s so many would assume the percentage of female veterinarians in leadership positions (associations, corporate, academia) would self-correct. The numbers for today's veterinary associations, corporations, and veterinary colleges does not reflect this however. Some statistical examples:

- 6 out of 30 U.S. veterinary college deans are women
- Data from a few websites reveals that women constitute: 2 of 12 Hill's executives, 1 of 8 Zoetis board members, 1 of 11 executive officers at Elanco, VCA Antech: 0 (John, John, John, Frank, and CEO Robert), Merck 2 of 12 board members are women
- Most state and allied veterinary associations have predominantly male leadership—in a survey of ASVMAE members, 64% of responding geographic-based VMAs have predominantly male veterinarian leadership and 73% of non-geographic or specialty-based VMAs have predominantly male veterinarian leadership.
- Some presidential statistics: ACVS has had 3 female presidents (1992, 1996, and 2012), AAEP has had 2 female presidents (2008 and 2013) with one slated for office in 2016, and AVMA has had 3 female presidents (1996, 2004, 2011).

AVMA has recognized the need for more gender diversity in its leadership as evidenced by several reports from several different entities over the last 10 years. AVMA is also a foundational supporter of the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative (WVLDI).

Examples include:

- from the Unity Through Diversity Report by the AVMA Task Force on Diversity (2005):

https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/Documents/diversity_report.pdf

- “encourage and support the development of diversity entities (committees or task forces) at all levels of organized veterinary medicine... These should include veterinarians of different ages and both genders; with varied racial, ethnic, or cul-

tural backgrounds; especially those who are underrepresented in leadership roles.”

- from the 2020 Vision Commission Report:

<https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reports/Documents/2020visionreport.pdf>

- One of the 11 recommendations to transform AVMA “by 2020, the AVMA should have: Reflected the changing demographic, ethnic and generational differences of society and actively engaged more women in leadership roles”
- In order to achieve this, the commissions recommended that “AVMA affirms and ensures there is synergy across generations and demographics of members including:
 - **Ensuring representation of women in leadership and membership roles**
 - When filling roles within AVMA (e.g., Executive Board, House of Delegates, task forces, councils, and paid positions, etc.) actively consider how to incorporate or engage members who represent the changing demographics and generations of the profession
 - Develop strategy to help ensure that there is appropriate generational and demographic representation within the larger veterinary profession as a whole”
- In the same section, “In addition to generational issues, the other major shift is the number of women entering the profession and assuming leadership roles. **The needs of professional women, their interests, incentives, priorities, style, and reasons to join and participate in the AVMA are critical considerations in the success and future of the organization.** AVMA must carefully assess its organizational culture, structure, past assumptions and flexibility to ensure that the organization attracts and retains women as members and supports them to serve in multiple roles, especially in key leadership positions. This was a strong and recurring theme from our data collection and discussions.”
- from the AVMA National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues (NCVEI) article, *Future needs and recommendations for leadership in veterinary medicine* (2005): “In light of the gender shift, a specific need for leadership training for women was recognized. In that regard, **more women are needed in academic and traditional leadership roles as mentors and role models.** Women often take nontraditional leadership roles and are less visible. The female leadership style is often different than that of males and must therefore be trained and nurtured differently.”

<http://avmajournals.avma.org/doi/pdf/10.2460/javma.2005.226.1060>

Is it important for a profession that has become and will continue to be predominantly female to have female leaders at the table where decisions are made about that profession (professional association level, public policy/political level, university level, corporate board level)?

Questions for participants:

- **What barriers to you see in participating in veterinary association leadership?**
- **Which of these do you see as gender-specific and which are generational/life stage?**
- **How could these change to allow for more diverse and widespread involvement among AVMA or other association members?**

Take home message:

- **Your voice is needed at the leadership table.**
- **Introduce yourself or be introduced to the current leaders of your associations.**
- **Seek out leadership development opportunities! Non-technical skills (i.e. communication, business, management) acquired are invaluable to success in your career.**
- **Build support networks and connections—support each other in the leadership pipeline.**
- **Contact WVLDI for help and support! (womenveterinarians.org, Facebook group and page, Linked In group, Twitter)**