

AAEP NEWS

Ethics: Resolving professional differences with dignity

By Loni Taylor, DVM

A recent case brought before the AAEP's Professional Conduct and Ethics Committee involved slander of a veterinarian by another veterinarian via social media. As the committee reviewed the case, the topic struck a sharp chord with myself and others. As veterinarians, we should be assisting each other instead of tearing each other down.

For a moment, let's review the oath we stated when we entered this profession:

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge.

I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

Although our veterinary oath doesn't specifically state that we are to work together, I personally feel that many actions of individuals today brought to the committee's attention do not express the dignity that is spoken of in the second section of the oath we all swore to.

It may be debatable as to whether this is a problem with only our profession or if it is a current societal problem. I ask you to consider this: Should we behave above the standards that society has set for us? I believe this to be an overwhelming yes! There are diplomatic and professional ways to disagree with a colleague that do not tear our industry down.

Let's take a moment to look at our industry compared to a few other professions. According to the AVMA's "2013 U.S. Veterinary Workforce Study: Modeling Capacity Utilization," we had approximately 90,200 active veterinarians in 2012. The study also stated we would be graduating approximately 3,457 veterinarians that year. In 2013, the published paper "A Census of Actively Licensed Physicians in the United States, 2012" stated that there were 878,194 actively licensed medical doctors and osteopathic doctors, with an astounding 661,996 graduates expected that year. The American Bar Association estimated 1,245,205 licensed lawyers in the U.S. in the same year. These numbers are presented to illustrate just how small our profession is compared to some of the other prominent professions in the U.S.



Dr. Loni Taylor

Personally these numbers make me feel proud. I feel like I belong to a small but elite group of individuals, each of whom has dedicated their life to "use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge." These numbers can also be daunting. When you are such a small profession, it doesn't take many individuals or scandals to completely tear the profession down.

I do not want to promote complacency amongst the members of our veterinary medicine community; rather I would like to ask that if you find yourself in disagreement with another member or sector of the profession, please find a professional and dignified way to discuss the difference of opinion. Slander and belittling of a certain individual or procedure via social media will do nothing but blemish our small profession. A group that appears fractured will not survive very long.

I personally love the difference of opinions in veterinary medicine and feel it is beneficial to our patients as a whole. We must remember to utilize our differences in treatment modalities and viewpoints to further veterinary medicine—not to damage what I believe to be one of the purest and most upstanding professions practicing medicine today.

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