Introduction: Animal Welfare in Veterinary Medical Education and Research

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On November 8–11, 2009, an Animal Welfare Symposium titled “Swimming with the Tide: Animal Welfare in Veterinary Medical Education and Research,” which was jointly organized and hosted by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC), was held at Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. An international line-up of speakers presented key information on the role of the veterinary profession in promoting animal-welfare-related education, research, and advocacy to more than 225 attendees. An animal’s health, its conscious experiences, and its ability to engage in species-typical behaviors were all recognized as contributing to its welfare, and consequently, the study of animal welfare requires the collaboration of researchers and practitioners from many disciplines, both scientific and nonscientific.

There was wide agreement that veterinarians are key to protecting animal well-being because of the important role they play as intermediaries among animals, their owners, and the public. To assume their rightful place as leaders in this field, however, speakers and panelists emphasized that veterinarians must accept the study of animal welfare as a legitimate discipline and actively participate in the wider social discussion about how animals are appropriately used and cared for. Although some veterinary colleges offer courses and other educational opportunities in an effort to prepare students for this role, there is currently a noticeable gap between aspiration and achievement, and challenges exist in finding room in already crowded curricula to deliver more information. Given the considerable knowledge and time burdens occupying students and working veterinarians, organizations that represent the profession, such as the AVMA, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association, the AAVMC, and state, provincial, and other allied veterinary associations, also need to take an active role in preparing veterinarians to respond to their duty to ensure good animal welfare in all sectors in which animals are used by society.

The articles that follow were contributed by speakers and panelists participating in the symposium and represent part of its proceedings. Our hope is that these articles will contribute useful ideas and stimulate active discussion that will improve the delivery of animal-welfare-related information to veterinary medical students and graduate veterinarians.

We would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the financial and in-kind contributions of our sponsors that assisted in making this event possible. In that regard, we sincerely thank the US Department of Agriculture–Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service/Animal Care, P&G Pet Care, the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare of the National Institutes of Health, and Michigan State University.

Otto von Bismarck is credited with remarking, “Man cannot create the current of events. He can only float with them and steer.” The AVMA/AAVMC Symposium reflects recognition that concern for animal well-being is a strong and prevailing current and that the veterinary profession wants, and needs, to take its place at the helm.

NOTES

a Additional information about the symposium, including a full agenda, is available at www.avma.org/awsymposium
b Audiovisual recordings of the event are also available. Please visit www.avma.org/awsymposium for more information.
c The views expressed in written conference materials or publications, and by speakers and moderators, do not necessarily reflect the official views of the AVMA, the AAVMC, or the event sponsors, nor does mention of trade names, commercial practices, or organizations imply endorsement by the AVMA, the AAVMC, or the event sponsors.

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