



By Dr. Kent Hoblet

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The first publicly supported veterinary medical college in the U.S. was founded at Iowa State University in 1879. From the beginning, the mission of our veterinary colleges has been to serve the nation's needs in both animal and public health. In public health, the emphasis has been on the prevention and control of zoonotic diseases, or those diseases that can be transmitted from animals to people. In these roles, veterinary medical colleges and veterinarians provide a critical link between agriculture and human medicine. While the overall mission of colleges of veterinary medicine encompasses the traditional range of teaching, research and public service, nothing is more important than training new veterinarians.

Following WWII, U.S. society changed from being predominantly rural to being largely urbanized, a trend that has accelerated in the past 30 years. Urbanization, coupled with affluence, has led to increased demand for companion animal veterinary medical care. The human-animal bond is real, and people often expect their pets will receive a level of medical care similar to their own. A challenge for the colleges is to meet the

increasing demand for education in companion animal medicine while continuing to address critical needs for veterinary expertise in public health, food safety and security and biomedical research. The emergence of diseases such as avian influenza and the threat of biological and agro-terrorism has increased the need for additional veterinarians specialized in these areas.

From the viewpoint of societal demand, this is a very good time for veterinary medicine. Much of veterinary medical instruction is conducted on nearly an individual basis, which means that the 28 U.S. colleges of veterinary medicine (located in 26 states) are able to produce only about 2,500 new veterinarians each year. Available evidence suggests this number will not be enough to meet all the needs veterinarians are uniquely qualified to fill. For example, just to maintain current levels of veterinarians in either food animal or public practice, at least 500 of these new graduates must enter these fields each year.

Although the veterinary medical curriculum is demanding, career opportunities for those who receive the DVM degree are unprecedented. It's been predicted the current shortage, coupled with a projected increase in need as our nation's population continues to grow, will result in an overall shortage of 15,000 veterinarians over the next 20 years.

In the short time I've been in Mississippi, many things have impressed me. One is the foresight that the Legislature, commodity groups and the veterinary profession had in the 1970s when they led in establishing our college of veterinary medicine. As I travel in Mississippi, I'm struck by the uncommon level of support shown for Mississippi State University and its College of Veterinary Medicine. For my wife Connie and me, it's both gratifying and humbling, and we're honored to be part of it.

Students entering the College of Veterinary Medicine at MSU have the opportunity to study with faculty nationally recognized for their expertise. Completing our curriculum enables students to experience the breadth of veterinary medicine and graduate to enter an intellectually challenging and financially rewarding career, whether in private practice, research or in the public practice arena. Graduates of Mississippi State University's College of Veterinary Medicine are in high demand.

Beginning now, and for the next several years, our college's administration, faculty and staff are going to engage within Mississippi State University and across the state in telling young people of the tremendous opportunities in veterinary medicine and the wonderful resource available to them in their state.