



Health Services Interim Committee Meeting October 9, 2014

Good Afternoon Madam Chair and Members of the Health Services Committee. For the record, my name is Nancy Kopp. I represent the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association.

I appear before you today, upon your request, to provide the number of licensed Veterinary Technicians and “Veterinary Technicians” or “assistants” that have received on-the-job training, employed in our state.

The NDVMA did survey its 230 practicing members in August, and provide you with a sampling of the statistics. Out of the 48 responses we received, their practices employ 139 licensed technicians and 87 non-licensed or on-the-job trained veterinary technicians or assistants. The ND State Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners, reported 312 licensed Veterinary Technicians in 2014. I can only assume that a number of the 87 are assistants, along with a few that have graduated from an accredited vet tech program, but have not yet taken the national licensing exam. In many instances, an assistant will work under the general supervision of a Veterinary Technician as well, the Veterinary Technician works under the supervision of a licensed Veterinarian.

You also asked that the NDVMA provide comments on how we can improve the state’s Veterinary Loan Repayment Program and tuition assistance, provided through the PSEP and in collaboration with the North Dakota Stockman’s Association.

I don’t suspect that this Committee, nor the Appropriations Committee, is looking to abolish their commitment to the education of these North Dakota students pursuing a professional degree, in a program not available in state, rather seeking incentives to these state supported professionals, to provide services in underserved parts of our state.

The only possible solution, I can offer at this time, is to possibly shift some of the PSEP funding to the Dental and Veterinary Medical Loan Forgiveness Programs that presently exist and not implement a Repayment Provision to the PSEP, as your commitment to providing an affordable education to those professional services most crucial to the healthcare of North Dakotans.

I would like to introduce to you, Dr. Judy Gibbens, President of the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association, to provide brief comments and will address any of the statements that follow:

1. The importance of veterinary medicine to North Dakota now and in the future.
2. The cost of attaining a Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine and the role ND PSEP program plays in the ability for ND students to attend veterinary school.
3. The cost of starting a rural practice. Take for example the young couple currently moving to Towner, ND to set up practice vs 1985 when I graduated.

4. The influence of women on the practice of veterinary medicine, as women comprise over 75% of students in veterinary school. The importance of maintaining a work – life balance where the practice does not consume all a person’s time and energy.
5. Recognizing the importance of livestock organizations such as the ND Stockmen’s Association’s Ag mentoring program, where annually some of the participants are paired with practicing livestock veterinarians. Ensure North Dakota young people with an interest in ag and livestock production see the potential for a career in veterinary medicine.
6. Organizations such as the Academy of Rural Veterinarians of which Ashley, ND veterinarian Dr. Dean Christianson is president, promote nationally the possibilities and potential for veterinarians in rural, underserved areas. Dr. Christianson recently recruited and hired two veterinary associates, one from Kansas and one from Alabama using the ideas and connections promoted by the Academy.
7. Continuing the success we have seen as Dr. Dyer and his NDSU team collaborate with Kansas State in selecting potential ND veterinary students, with an interest and aptitude in livestock production medicine.
8. Supporting the Veterinary Loan Repayment Program. Consider reducing the number of students receiving PSEP assistance and putting that money into additional support for young veterinarians, to find a financially feasible way to practice in rural, underserved areas.
9. Underscoring the need for the communities in the rural areas to support the new veterinarians whether that be through their community economic development programs, helping with start-up money, utilizing the services, paying their bills on time.
10. Evidence that students are returning to North Dakota to practice where is it economically viable.
11. Look at the number of positions available compared to the number of North Dakota veterinary students graduating each year. It would be conceivable to saturate the supply of veterinarians in the state by compelling them to return, which would negatively impact the demand for their services, resulting in lower salaries and increased financial hardship.
12. Recognize the potential for North Dakota veterinary students to see areas of interest and potential expertise opening up to them, once they are in veterinary school. Let these young people be promoters of North Dakota values, work ethic, and integrity no matter where they choose to practice and proudly support them as products of our state.
13. Recommend continuing the PSEP program as it has been since 1983 and continue giving ND veterinary students a leg up, not a free ride, to pursue their career where their vision takes them.