

World Veterinary Year 2011 Veterinary student essay competition winners



Celebrating 250 years of the veterinary profession

Congratulations to **Becca Leung** and **Sahil Dhillon**, joint winners of our Vet2011 veterinary student essay competition. Entrants were asked to describe what they believe will be New Zealand's needs of the veterinary profession over the next 20 years, outside that of veterinary clinical practice, and to describe what skills they believe future veterinarians and veterinary para-professionals will need to have to meet these needs. The prize winners received \$1,000 cash and free travel and registration to the 2011 NZVA conference in Hamilton. We are also publishing the winning essays in Vetscript – Becca Leung's entry on this page and Sahil Dhillon's later this year.

Veterinarians of the future

by **Becca Leung**

The field of veterinary medicine has changed dramatically since its revolutionary foundation in the eighteenth century or even since James Herriot first picked up a scalpel in the twentieth century. While veterinarians have traditionally been seen simply as white-coated clinicians, the changing of the centuries brought a growing awareness of the numerous public roles, and uniforms, veterinarians fill. It also brought a greater understanding of the intimate relationship between humans and animals.

The year 2011 brings not only a celebration of the 250th world anniversary of the establishment of the veterinary profession by Claude Bourgelat, it also marks the achievement of those in the field as the guardians of this unique bond. In the next 20 years, the diverse roles veterinarians play will be even more important to New Zealand, and to the rest of the world, as we face food production, animal welfare, animal health, sustainability and environmental issues. As students of

veterinary medicine, we have the opportunity and responsibility to anticipate these future public needs and hone the skills now that will be needed to meet these challenges head-on.

One of the most evident ways animals are intertwined in our lives is through our dinner plates. New Zealand consumers want to know that their food items are safe and wholesome, and they entrust the Government and the food production industry to ensure this. This concern for food safety is especially important for New Zealand because, as one of the world's largest exporters of meat, dairy products and seafood, our goods affect people all over the world. In addition, with humanity facing a growing global hunger crisis, food is a sacred commodity that can ill afford to be threatened.

Veterinarians are unique in that they participate in all sections of the food production industry, from the farms to processing to consumption, and so play an essential role in keeping our food supply

Erratum

In the previous edition of *Vetscript* I made an error in the legends for two of the photographs in my article, "The Value of a Blood Smear Examination" (*Vetscript*, May 2011, page 20). The legends on Figures 3 and 4 had been swapped. The correct version is below.

Jenni Donald, New Zealand Veterinary Pathology Ltd

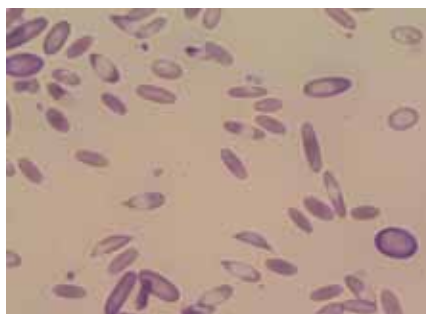


Figure 3: Iron deficiency anaemia in an alpaca. Camelids have oval red cells but here they are pale with some showing the typical banding of iron deficiency anaemia. A few tear-drop cells are also present. In this case there was still some regeneration occurring because there were a few polychromatophils.

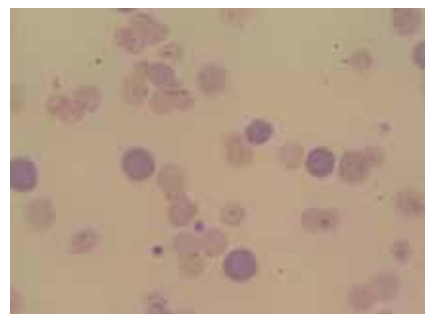


Figure 4: Feline infectious anaemia due to *Mycoplasma haemofelis*. The organisms appear as small dots and in chains on the surface of the red cells. The darker cells are polychromatophils.

safe. It would also be wise for future veterinarians to explore careers outside the traditional clinical role and consider a profession in public health and food safety, because they are an integral part of our society. Alongside the special education we receive in microbiology and animal diseases, food safety veterinarians will need to understand the epidemiology of diseases and their potential effects on society.

Another ongoing concern in the food industry is animal welfare. Though New Zealand has animal welfare legislation of the highest quality, society will continually call for review of policies to see if welfare can be improved. The New Zealand Government and lawmakers will face pressure from their constituents to make these reviews. In turn, veterinarians will be called upon to examine our production systems and suggest changes if need be. As future vets, we will need to understand current animal welfare legislation and food production systems in order to advise on these matters prudently.

An additional role veterinarians play is that of watchdog to the health of not only animals but also of humans. With the threat of inter-species diseases and zoonoses, there will always be a connection between the state of health in humans and that in animals. The Government and the public need veterinarians to monitor the spread of illnesses in animals and prevent any crossover to humans. Although New Zealand is fortunate to have few endemic zoonoses, we also have a special situation of a high domestic stock to humans ratio and an economy that is agriculturally based. Because of this, animal health is an immensely important issue that must be continually addressed. Infectious diseases like swine and avian influenza, Ebola, West Nile virus and other cross-species virulent diseases can easily enter through our borders if they are not adequately monitored. As future veterinarians, we will need to have knowledge about such diseases, their pathology and their potential movements between wildlife, domestic animals and humans. We will ultimately need to be able to observe and effectively handle an outbreak of any nature in order to prevent an epidemic. All-species health is a great responsibility that we take as guardians of the both animal and human populations.

Finally, the next 20 years will augment the role veterinarians have in preserving New Zealand's ecosystem. Never before have concerns

Becca Leung is a second-year veterinary student at Massey University. Originally from the United States, she has a bachelor's degree in animal science and a minor in business administration from the University of Florida. Becca decided to come to New Zealand to pursue her dream of becoming a wildlife veterinarian specialising in nutrition. Her hobbies include photography, cycling, tramping and anything to do with the outdoors. "I can't think of a more beautiful country to do it all in," Becca says.



about the environment, pollution, biodiversity and production sustainability been as apparent to society as they are now. There is a growing need for veterinarians to work alongside the Government and the public to take on concerns like overfishing and protecting our endemic species. These issues will require veterinarians who have skills in wildlife management, research and, most importantly, communication, because veterinarians may directly interact with the Government and members of the public.

With the changing of the centuries, veterinarians have emerged as performers of many important roles. Outside a clinical setting, we find ourselves in the food industry, working with the Government on welfare and environmental issues, communicating as an authority figure to members of the public, and maintaining the health of both animals and humans. While there are many skills needed to take on these immense responsibilities, as future veterinarians, we have the opportunity to choose our own path and sharpen specific skills that will allow us to complete our roles successfully. We will find that we are just a singular part of the veterinary profession that ultimately strives for a healthier planet, for all. ■

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