May 9, 2014

Dear Colleagues,

Dr. Robert Marshak recently contacted state veterinary medical association leaders to ask them to provide written testimony to the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) opposing the continued recognition of the Council on Education (COE) as the official accrediting agency for professional veterinary medical programs.

It is important that you recognize that Dr. Marshak is not speaking on behalf of academic veterinary medicine as it is organized and represented through the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC). The AAVMC supports the continued recognition of the Council on Education as the official accrediting agency in academic veterinary medicine. The COE is broadly accepted throughout the educational community and widely recognized as the most appropriate accrediting agency in academic veterinary medicine.

Our position on this matter is based on a review and analysis that began in late 2012 when the COE filed a Petition for Continued Recognition with the USDE. As part of that process, AAVMC provided testimony in support of the COE during hearings held in Washington, D.C. on December 12, 2012. Following those hearings, USDE made several recommendations. The COE has responded to those recommendations and has taken action to assure it remains in strategic alignment with the changing needs of the profession and the society it serves.

Specifically, the selection process for COE members has been changed to a model more similar to the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), which accredits allopathic medical programs. The AVMA House of Delegates no longer elects COE Council members; instead, eight members representing the practitioner community are appointed by an AVMA selection committee made up of well-respected leaders in the veterinary profession, and eight members representing the academic community are appointed by an AAVMC selection committee. Both the AVMA and the AAVMC have established a nomination and selection process that requires a thorough review of the candidates’ credentials to assure that COE members have the necessary qualifications and experience to serve on the Council.

The COE must apply the standards of accreditation in a manner that assures that accredited colleges and schools of veterinary medicine produce qualified entry-level veterinarians. In contrast to Dr. Marshak’s assertion, it is not appropriate to use the accreditation process as a means to regulate or limit the number of veterinary graduates entering the workforce. We believe the composition of the Council (eight private-practicing veterinarians, eight veterinary academicians, one representative from the Canadian VMA, and three public members who are
not veterinarians) provides broad perspective, promotes reasoned discourse, and results in carefully considered decisions regarding accreditation of veterinary colleges.

Dr. Marshak is a distinguished educator who has made significant contributions to the veterinary medical profession. We respect his right to question the efficacy of the accreditation system and present his views and opinions regarding the need for change. However, important facts such as the size and quality of the applicant pool for admission to the nation’s schools and colleges of veterinary medicine must be presented clearly and accurately. Our data shows that the number of applicants per seat and the quality of the applicants has remained essentially unchanged over the past 10 years. When viewed from a broader historical perspective, there are no significant drops in the applicant pool over the past 30 years, and there was never a time during that period when there were seven applicants per seat as Dr. Marshak states. The pre-veterinary grade point average has steadily increased from 3.5 in 2004 to 3.6 in 2013. This information is available on the Public Data section of our website at http://aavmc.org/About-AAVMC/Public-Data.aspx

The present accreditation system is a standards-driven, evidence-based process. The COE is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of the veterinary medical profession and it has demonstrated both the appropriateness and the capacity to consider evolving models of education in a rapidly changing world. Furthermore, we are confident that the COE operates freely and independently of any undue influences exerted by the AVMA, the AAVMC, or any other elements that would detract from the COE’s core mission to serve the public interest. We remain convinced that the existing system supports this process with integrity, effectiveness, and fidelity to the highest standards of public service.

I trust that you will carefully consider any action you choose to take with respect to the upcoming USDE hearings and I invite you to contact me directly with any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

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