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Unmet needs in veterinary behavior and behavioral medicine: the case for more scientific rigor

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Editorial August 2015

Unmet needs in veterinary behavior and behavioral medicine: the case for more scientific rigor

The *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Application and Research* is the only journal within the broad fields of veterinary medicine and animal behavior that has as a special focus veterinary behavior and behavioral medicine. It's the only journal with a dual focus on both the clinical aspects of behavioral and welfare issues (e.g., 'wellness', mental health, and both problematic and pathological behaviors) and the relevance of the basic sciences (e.g., evolutionary biology, ethology, neurobiology, neurobehavioral genetics, et cetera). So it is fitting that our first paper in this issue is about veterinarians whose focus is behavioral medicine. Ballantyne and Buller (2015) used an internet questionnaire to assay the responses of an international group of specialists in veterinary behavioral medicine, residents in veterinary behavioral medicine, and veterinarians who were not specialists but who focused on behavioral medicine cases to learn about training and career satisfaction. Interestingly, while specialists felt more comfortable discussing clinical issues with clients than did non-specialist practitioners, none of the factors surveyed (e.g., date of graduation, training), alone, was responsible for this. In fact, although those practicing behavioral medicine felt spread thin, their complaints were no different than recent studies have shown for veterinarians, in general, although some of the patterns of responses bear closer study.

The irony, and the concern for the field here, is that within the past 15 years the number of programs in veterinary behavioral medicine has decreased at veterinary schools in the US. And while Ballantyne and Buller (2015) note that there are only 8 residencies in veterinary schools in the US, many of these are unavailable or only periodically available because of lack of funding. Two of the oldest clinical university programs in behavioral medicine in the US ceased to exist this year: the University of Minnesota, College of Veterinary Medicine and the University of Georgia, College of Veterinary Medicine both terminated their clinical and residency programs in 2015. All of the tenured positions in the field in the US could be swept away soon in a wave of retirements. This is at a time when many specialists in the field in the US who are in private specialty practice have appointments scheduled 4-6 months in advance. The paper by Ballantyne and Buller, combined with these data, suggest that there is a profound mismatch between needs, understanding and training. One solution could be for industry and institutions of higher education to invest in more and more rigorous training in the field, as is done in so many other specialities, and has been done for neuroscience and psychiatry in human medicine. The key field that ties together welfare, veterinary medicine and basic science for all animals is behavior. This *Journal* was created, in part, to address this unmet need. We must do more.

The contribution by Landsberg et al. (2015) continues to build on the noise induced anxiety/fear model that the author's group has developed for laboratory beagles to investigate the potential

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