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Are We Teaching More Now And Educating Men Less?

by

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"Education the discipline of mind or character through study or instruction."—Webster.

"Education is that which is left when we have forgotten that which we have learned in school."—Einstein.

In recent years there has been an increasing concern on the part of those in veterinary education with the status of our schools and with the need for a change in their methods. This increasing introspective trend has been evidenced on our own campus in the past year by a successful conference on undergraduate education involving the entire faculty, by the Dean's academic review, and by the reactivation of a student committee on curriculum evaluation. The need for these types of inquiries has risen largely from two major factors. First, the tremendous burgeoning of scientific knowledge has made some of our older methods of presentation inadequate and has crowded our curriculum with new areas which must be explored by the students. Second, the increasing need for more veterinarians and the onrush of larger numbers of qualified students seeking education in veterinary medicine has placed new demands on our schools. The concern and study now underway throughout our profession are largely directed at solving the problems presented by the above factors.

This concern has already manifested itself in a number of curriculum changes in *some* of our veterinary colleges. Courses have been intensified and extended; the school day has been filled from seven to five, the school year has been extended throughout the calendar year, and there is talk of pushing more and more scientific material back into the pre-vet years. The presence of these changes might fool us into thinking that our major aim is still toward *educating* men as veterinarians, when, in fact, we will be only satisfying the immediate demands of our society in *training* large numbers of technically competent veterinarians in as short a time as possible. This, if true, could eventually lead to a lack of broadly educated men in our profession, a lack of direction, a lack of foresight, and in fact, a lack of the continuing progress which has characterized veterinary medicine in the last half century.

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This brings us squarely to the question of what constitutes an educated man. There is no simple answer to this question. However, it has been well stated that while science gives us knowledge and technology tells us what that knowledge can do, it is wisdom which tells us what that knowledge *should* do. We see that education should not be directed only toward science and technology but must aid or at least allow the student an opportunity to know more of his society and of himself. Education along these lines certainly does not of itself lead to wisdom. But, a broad knowledge leading to an understanding outside of the scientific area should give the scientist the tools needed in making value judgements concerning the place of his science in relation to the whole, i.e., aid him in knowing what his science should do.

This way of thinking certainly does not make knowledge in the so-called humanities merely a luxury which would be "nice" for our graduates to have. This latter idea is a superficial, sterile, and in some ways a crassly commercial one. It suggests that a passing knowledge of human problems, human values, and human creativity outside of the scientific area is a part of a cloak which we must put on along with our white shirt and tie in order to be professional. This is dangerous hypocrisy, for, as science continues to move forward in its influence on society, it is essential that the professional man (the liason between the scientific and the lay community) have a real knowledge of and a deep concern for these human relationships in order that he may judge the scientific advances in their true perspective and be a voice in guiding his community in its judgements.

Within our present curriculum a change in attitudes on the part of both students and faculty could perhaps result in a much fuller and broader educational experience for all concerned.

Faculty, reacting to the pressures of the mass of new knowledge in their own specialized areas, tend to push the student much further within this area than may be necessary or feasible. With our counterparts in other areas doing much the same, this often results in a competition for the student's time and a badgering of the student for his attention.

The student reacts to this pressure by magnifying it, leading to the creation of the myth of the extreme difficulty of the veterinary curriculum. This myth adds to the "prestige" of the "vet" student on campus and appears to give him a sort of masochistic pleasure and often is responsible for a four year period of near monastic existence in an extremely narrow area of study which limits the development of the mind and character rather than aiding it. A result is that we more often graduate men with exhausted rather than awakened minds. This trend, if pursued by faculty and students, will lead to the incongruity that in the future the *most schooled individual might well be the one least educated.*

This is merely a reiteration of the warning concerning the dangers inherent in overspecialization. The student apathy which we hear so much about today on our campuses might well be the result of an overspecialized outlook and a lack of understanding or concern for the "whole". This may be reflected throughout our society. Overspecialization and its accompanying dangers are by-products of the rapidly increasing advance of knowledge. Are they necessary or inevitable by-products? Cannot each of us attempt to minimize these in our own minds as we strive to maintain a sense of perspective concerning ourselves and our science in our society?

Retrospection is necessary if we are to view our area in its true relationship to the whole of the educational picture. *It might be well to ask ourselves if the study of veterinary medicine is really all that difficult or is it rather the passing*

of the courses in the veterinary curriculum which is so difficult? There is a difference. Is most of the pressure which places demands on the students' time a result of the weight of the subject matter or is it an artificial one which could be relieved to some extent? In our teaching, are we producing any change in the mind, in the thinking, or in the character of our students which might remain after they have forgotten the facts which they have learned in our courses?

As students, is it not important that we realize the value of the very unique educational experience we are offered by being able to spend at least four years in the university environment? A look around could reveal a wide variety of experience in which a student could involve himself and which could add to and broaden his education without ever signing up for a course outside of his major area. The university environment offers great opportunity to become involved in the lives and learning of others of quite different background, direction, and outlook. Few students take any advantage of this and, for many, little in their educational experience would be changed were the veterinary complex lifted and relocated off in the middle of the prairie, far from any contact with the rest of the academic community. Often it is not until we as practitioners find ourselves out in the middle of this same prairie, either actually or figuratively, that we think back on and become aware of these advantages and opportunities which we had ignored or taken for granted as students.

The pressures of the curriculum, whether real or contrived, must share a large portion of the blame in this; however, a large segment of the student population goes through its years of formal education and through life, merely by jumping any hurdle which might be placed in its way and hence, would make poor use of any extra opportunities which might be allowed them. Might not the profession suffer less if we allow these poor students to abuse extra opportunities than if we continue to force the good student to abuse by not *allowing* him time to take full advantage of them?

As we continue to view the future of veterinary education, we are called upon to take a broader look at the educational goals of our profession so that we might judge the importance of the more immediate demands on our profession against its long terms needs. To repeat, it may be largely a change in view point on the part of students and faculty, rather than a curricular change, that would aid in meeting long term needs. It is hoped that this paper might serve to call attention to the fact that no matter how large the body of science and technology may become, they will remain only a part of the educated scientist's armamentarium. If these gains in science and technology make changes in our curriculum necessary, it should be felt that the *necessary* is not always the *best*, and our minds should always remain open to any valid method or attitude which would aid in giving true perspective to the educational process.

Under any system, men of foresight and judgement will appear and take the leadership of the profession. However, would it not more rapidly advance our profession if larger numbers did this *because* of the *system* rather than a few *in spite of it*?