1964

Status Quo

Kristina Bloomquist

Iowa State University

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Recommended Citation

Bloomquist, Kristina (1964) "Status Quo," Iowa State University Veterinarian: Vol. 26 : Iss. 4 , Article 4.
Available at: https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian/vol26/iss4/4

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Many veterinary students are minimally aware of public attitudes toward themselves as a group and toward their profession. As veterinary students, we are under considerable scholastic pressure; we attend classes with other veterinary students for four years and frequently our social contacts are only with other veterinary students. These factors encourage myopia toward and a lack of awareness of our public image. Favorable and respectful public opinions of Veterinary Medicine are desirable for each member of the public is a potential user of our services.

Recently several upperclassmen polled people on campus to evaluate our public relations. They asked two questions: 1.) what do you think of the student in Veterinary Medicine? 2.) What is your opinion of the role of the veterinarian after graduation?

Replies to the first question indicate a generally favorable attitude. Some samples are: “fine and admirable position,” “admire the veterinary student,” “rough curriculum,” “can be proud of their goals,” “work hard, are smart,” “intelligent, serious,” “independent, deep thinkers.”

The replies to question number two have more importance in that they present a disquieting ignorance of veterinarians as medical scientists. Examples are: “vaccinates animals and takes care of pets,” “only knows that they are animal doctors,” “pets are a part of the family and the veterinarian has an important role in caring for that family member,” “really doesn’t know,” “useful member of the community,” “should be a community leader,” “role is educating the farmer.”

This poll was very limited in scope and in numbers interviewed and could not be considered statistical, but it is worthy of consideration. We can conclude that veterinary students are admired and respected for their intelligence and industry. The graduate veterinarian is expected to be a responsible, active community member, but veterinarians are thought of only as animal doctors. The concept of veterinarians as theoretical and/or practicing scientists seems to have almost entirely escaped those polled. There was no mention of the veterinarian’s contribution to public health or to research.

Each veterinarian or veterinary student is responsible for maintaining and improving a favorable, respectful, and realistic public attitude towards the entire profession. Veterinary Medicine does not automatically endow an individual with superior qualities that are worthy of respect—but responsible, ethical, industrious, progressive members earn respect for the profession.

* K. Bloomquist is a sophomore student in the college of Veterinary Medicine at Iowa State University.