Merck Animal Health Veterinary Wellbeing Study

February 2018
Recent publications suggest that veterinarians have a high level of mental distress and elevated suicide rate.
Background & Purpose

• High levels of student debt combined with modest incomes have created serious enough concerns that AVMA conducted a major symposium on solutions
• Numerous reports of compassion fatigue and burnout exist in the profession
Questions

• Is there a mental health crisis in the profession?
• If so, what is contributing to it?
• What can be done about it?
Goals

Definitively quantify the prevalence of mental illness and stress in the veterinary profession

Compare to previous studies and general US population
Research Team

Ulrich Schimmack, PhD, University of Toronto
• Psychologist and wellbeing expert

Elizabeth Strand, PhD, LCSW, University of Tennessee CVM
• Licensed clinical social worker working in a veterinary setting

Linda Lord, DVM, PhD, Merck Animal Health (MAH)

Colin Siren, Kynetec Market Research

John Volk, Brakke Consulting
Methodology

- AVMA:
  - 20,000 randomly selected email addresses
  - Email letter alerting sample to upcoming study
- Email invitation + 2 reminders
- Incentive: Drawing for 20 $100 gift cards; contribution to AVMF
- Survey open Nov 2-16, 2017
- Average survey length 18.1 minutes.
- 3,540 usable, completed responses (17.7%)
- Data weighted based on age, gender and region of the US
- Margin of error +/- 1.62% at 95% confidence level
Two Key Measures

1. Serious psychological distress
   • i.e., Mental Health
   • Measured by standardized “Kessler 6” questions
Two Key Measures

2. Wellbeing

– Wellbeing examines the way individuals think and feel about their lives compared to the best/worst possible lives they can imagine.

– Measured and indexed using standardized questions

  • How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?
  • Suppose that the top of the ladder below represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you. Where are you on the ladder?
  • Please indicate your agreement with the following statement: “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal.”
Key Findings

- Mental illness among veterinarians similar to that found in the general population
  - Many not receiving treatment
- Overall, wellbeing is slightly lower than in the general population
- Significant variation by segment of the profession
Below are several issues you may or may not consider to be significant challenges faced by the veterinary profession today. Base: All Respondents: n=3,540
Only 41% of veterinarians recommend a career in veterinary medicine

Veterinarians
- Yes, 41%
- No, 33%
- Don't Know / Not Sure, 26%

General Population
- Yes, 70%
- No, 13%
- Don't Know / Not Sure, 17%

Physicians - 2016
- Yes, 51%
- No, 49%

Source: Omnibus Study
Source: Survey of America’s Physicians, 2016

CLINIC 9a. Would you recommend a career in veterinary medicine to a friend or family member?
Psychological Distress Consistent With US; Lower than Nett

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Type</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Distressed</th>
<th>Not Distressed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Veterinarians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAH Wellbeing Study</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>3,539</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>94.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nett Study</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>11,627</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>90.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed General Population</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSID</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,284</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>95.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Significantly lower than Nett Study. Difference between MAH and PSID study is not statistically significant.
- Significantly higher than both MAH and PSID studies.
More Psychological Distress in Younger Vets

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Distressed (%)</th>
<th>Not Distressed (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-34</td>
<td>n=1,085</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>91.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>n=582</td>
<td>9.1%</td>
<td>90.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>n=759</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>94.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>n=724</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>97.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
<td>n=367</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
<td>99.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total Sample n=3,539

© 2018 Intervet Inc., d/b/a Merck Animal Health, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc. All rights reserved.
Student Debt a Driver of Psychological Distress

WB5. Results based on results of Kessler 6.
Only Half of those Distressed Receiving Treatment

% Receiving Treatment or Medication for any Mental Health Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Distressed (n=205)</th>
<th>Not Distressed (n=3,289)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statistically Significant Difference

Major self-reported conditions of those distressed:

- Depression 94%
- Compassion fatigue/burnout 88%
- Anxiety, panic attacks 83%

MH1. Are you now taking medicine or receiving treatment from a doctor or other health professional for any type of mental health condition or emotional problem?

MH11. Does your practice or company offer an Employee Assistance Program (a program that helps assist employees with personal problems).
Veterinarian Wellbeing Slightly Lower Than General Population

U.S. Veterinarians
MAH Wellbeing Study
2017
n=3,539

9.1%
32.6%
58.3%

Employed General Population
PSID
n=6,284

7.3%
31.5%
61.2%

Segmentation Using MAH Wellbeing Index
Men Veterinarians Higher, Women Lower Than General Population

---

**U.S. Veterinarians MAH Wellbeing Study 2017**
- Male: 67.1% Suffering, 31.1% Getting By, 6.8% Flourishing
- Female: 51.3% Suffering, 38.0% Getting By, 10.7% Flourishing

**Employed General Population PSID 2017**
- Male: 61.6% Suffering, 26.1% Getting By, 8.3% Flourishing
- Female: 31.9% Suffering, 31.1% Getting By, 37.0% Flourishing

---

© 2018 Intervet Inc., d/b/a Merck Animal Health, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc. All rights reserved.
Wellbeing Varies Significantly by Age

Wellbeing Varies Significantly by Age

Suffering  Getting By  Flourishing

MAH Study Age: 18-34  n=1,088
MAH Study Age: 35-44  n=587
MAH Study Age: 45-54  n=765
MAH Study Age: 55-64  n=731
MAH Study Age: 65+  n=369

© 2018 Intervet Inc., d/b/a Merck Animal Health, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc. All rights reserved.
Student Debt Impacts Wellbeing, Regardless of Amount

Segmentation Using MAH Wellbeing Index

Level of Student Debt

Total Sample n=3,539

Total

Total Sample n=3,539

None n=2,097

$1-$99,999 n=573

$100,000-$199,999 n=410

$200,000+ n=460

Suffering

Getting By

% for Each Level of Student Debt

58.3%

65.6%

47.7%

41.8%

40.8%

32.6%

28.3%

38.0%

43.2%

43.6%

9.1%

6.1%

14.3%

15.0%

15.6%

© 2018 Intervet Inc., d/b/a Merck Animal Health, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc. All rights reserved.
Conclusions

Veterinary Medicine is not in a state of crisis. About 1 in 20 veterinarians are suffering serious psychological distress, consistent with what is found in the general population.

There’s a mental health treatment gap in veterinary medicine. While many veterinarians with serious psychological distress are getting treatment, a significant population is not. Few employers offer Employee Assistance Programs.
Recommendations

Veterinary Organizations

- Evaluate, improve and more effectively publicize existing organizational wellness resources
- Continue to seek ways to reduce student debt and improve financial conditions in the profession, especially for young veterinarians.
- Educate constituents about signs, symptoms and rates of mental illness among veterinarians
Recommendations

**Employers**

- Educate employees on the existence of mental health issues and provide time off for appointments with physicians and counselors.
- Outwardly discuss and set healthy practice expectations for work/life balance.
- Create mentoring programs for new employees to help them gain the skills and confidence need to perform satisfactorily in their career.
- Consider partnering with in-practice veterinary social work professionals.
Recommendations

You

- With the help of a mental health professional or coach develop a stress management plan.
- Retain a certified financial planner to develop a plan to manage finances and student debt.
- Budget time for healthy activities such as family time, socializing with friends, recreation and exercise. Limit time on social media.