

## MISSION STATEMENT

To improve the economic base of the veterinary profession, ensuring that the delivery of veterinary care and service meets the needs of society.

## How the National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues will deliver on its mission

Howard E. Rubin

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*Howard Rubin is the new chief executive officer of the National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues. He has multifaceted business experiences in the animal health industry, including building veterinary hospitals, which qualify him for this challenging leadership role. Rubin, who is a certified public accountant with an MBA degree, brings an additional dimension and a different skill set to the commission.*

*Since assuming his duties as CEO at the beginning of the year, Rubin has opened the commission's office where calls have begun to flow (847-925-1230). People are volunteering their ideas and time, enabling the commission to quickly become a viable clearinghouse focused on capitalizing on the opportunities highlighted by KPMG LLP Study. This update is Rubin's first opportunity to describe his approach.*



Howard E. Rubin

The National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues (NCVEI) was formed to address the problems identified in the KPMG LLP study (Megastudy). The board of directors agreed that they were not just going to produce one more interesting report. They didn't want to initiate discussion and debate that couldn't be sustained when the early interest died down. Neither did they want the data reports to be put on a "shelf" with earlier reports that failed to make a noticeable difference in the lives of veterinarians or the practice of animal medicine. Many of the issues identified for the first time in non-anecdotal terms have people in and around this profession shaking their collective heads in agreement and even

looking at their shoes. So, everyone seems to "know about the issues." Now is the time to figure out a way to take action.

A terrific job has been done identifying issues and opportunities. The study has turned the age-old suspicions about veterinary practice into hard data that can be measured and analyzed. Articles and letters to the editor in nearly every veterinary publication as well as national and local forums have stirred up the pot. Interest has not waned since the study was released in 1999! The NCVEI's plan is to seize the moment and channel the energy into deliverable action steps that will expand the economic base of veterinarians, enabling the profession to meet the public's needs

by delivering the highest levels of patient care. It is critical to emphasize the power of the relationship between sound economics and high quality care.

“Deliverable action steps” —a nice catchy phrase but what does it mean? The Megastudy and the subsequent Brakke management and behavior study have raised hundreds of talking points and contentious subjects. One could go on forever debating and discussing. The concerns are broad, and many are deeply rooted in our society. At this juncture, it is critical for the NCVEI to narrow the subjects and focus on specifically defining its goals in outcomes that can be measured. This is the only way to satisfy its constituencies and ultimately make an impact. It is time to move from awareness to solutions.

Six critical issues that must be addressed to improve the economic health of the profession have been identified. They are:

- Veterinarians' income
- Economic impact of large numbers of women in the profession
- Global demand for veterinary services in all categories
- Inefficiency of the delivery system
- Supply of veterinarians
- Skills, knowledge, aptitude, and attitude of veterinarians and veterinary students

Five working groups have been created to facilitate in-depth research and action plan development on key issues identified in the studies. Each group has a very specific charge:

**Pricing Strategies**—*Create analytical tools to help veterinary practices better understand their economics and pricing options.*

This group will research the behaviors that impact fee schedules, discounting, self-esteem, and practice philosophy.

**Promoting Greater Efficiency in the Delivery System**—*Produce strategies to communicate the need for increased efficiency in veterinary practices (eg, better use of support staff, capturing of charges for all services rendered).*

This group will conduct a productivity study of the veterinary profession to explore the development of working models for better asset utilization as well as practice consolidation.

**Promoting Increased Understanding of Customers and their Needs**—*Study market penetration and identify potential service areas where veterinarians can play a crucial role.*

Action plans will include tools for marketplace evaluation.

**Gender Issues**—*Ensure that all working groups' output addresses the needs of women constituents.*

This group is composed of an advisory panel of veterinarians and outside experts to assist in the development of action plans addressing gender issues. Areas of particular interest are business acumen, integration into the workforce, and balancing career and family.

**Skills, Knowledge, Aptitude, and Attitude of Veterinarians**—*Identify and produce competencies in veterinarians to ensure their economic well-being.*

The NCVEI's scope is not to address all of the issues nor can it be a panacea for all that ails the veterinary profession. Rather, we are looking for some narrow areas where an impact

can be determined. If a tool is created or a program developed, it must be widely adopted for it to be considered a success. Connected to these plans will be measurement tools that define expectations so we know whether the objectives of the project have been achieved, thus meeting the goals of the NCVEI. There is no interest in throwing a bunch of stuff against the wall hoping that something will stick. The NCVEI is setting out to hit a few singles so that the constituencies we serve can measure results in quantifiable terms. If the results can't be quantified, the qualitative output must be explicit.

This profession is filled with independently minded individuals and entrepreneurs. The NCVEI intends to have the creative orientation of an entrepreneur.

The question that has come up repeatedly is, “How are you going to change the behavior of veterinarians?” There must be a *compelling* need to change in the same way that new diagnostic tests and new pharmaceuticals shift the way veterinarians diagnose and treat disease. Without this powerful impetus there will be no change. This is the call to action; we must attract good people to help us think, with the balance of stakeholders willing to have open minds.

I cannot think of a more significant achievement than to raise the “economic bar” in veterinary medicine. Raising the bar will mean not just more income for veterinarians, but better and broader animal care. All of this will be reflected in a society and a marketplace that values veterinarians more highly. Through strong leadership and problem solving the NCVEI will build a common vision to achieve its critical goals.

Upcoming NCVEI Forum Event

**AVMA Annual Convention** July 16, 2001 Boston, MA

Watch for details on each program in veterinary publications.

