A Talk With Alan Kelly: Part Two

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Weeks. Dean Kelly will step down on October 1, 2005, after nearly 12 years as dean.

An Interview with the Dean

By Helma Weeks

Part one of an interview with Alan M. Kelly was published in the last edition of Bellwether. Below is the second installment of that interview with Helma Weeks. Dean Kelly will step down on October 1, 2005, after nearly 12 years as dean.

HW: In one of your messages you said the School should “strengthen interaction between clinicians and bench scientists.” Do you think that there is greater interaction now than when you became dean?

AMK: It’s not as much as I would like. There are many opportunities, but yes, there is more interaction. The research retreats, for example, helped to link the different parts of the School. I am always pleased when I hear of collaborations as a result of the retreat.

HW: You have worked hard for new diagnostic and treatment facilities in Philadelphia and at New Bolton. The Scott Building was completed and new radiology equipment installed at New Bolton. The Ryan Hospital refigured and renovated the wards and installed new equipment in many areas, yet the wish lists keep growing. It seems never-ending.

AMK: It is insatiable, and you find that when you buy expensive new equipment it is obsolete in five years.

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HW: What can be done to keep up with the constant diagnostic and treatment improvements?

AMK: It’s a real problem for veterinary medicine. The fastest rate of technological advances is occurring in companion-animal veterinary medicine, and it is the most expensive to keep at the cutting edge. I have some concerns about how much you can go on expecting public funds to finance incredibly sophisticated and expensive equipment for companion-animal care when a large percentage of the American public does not have health insurance or access to care. Support for MRIs, linear accelerators, etc., must increasingly come from private sources and from the $31 billion per year pet-products industry. I think there is a base of support for this to be accomplished.

In one of your messages you said the constant diagnostic and treatment improvements? What can the School do? Is there a way to get some endowment for future improvements?

AMK: It’s enormously important that veterinary medicine continues to provide critical services to the livestock and poultry industries. Because of consolidation of the livestock and poultry industries, our graduates must provide different services to producers and be educated in new disciplines. The vision of how the profession must change is beginning to emerge, but it hasn’t been well articulated yet. The profession has to seek public funds for infectious disease research, public health, epidemiology, everything related to food safety.

I should tell you about two things that I am really proud of at New Bolton Center that relate to this theme. One is the Marshak Dairy; it provides an educational setting in dairy medicine that is second to none. Drs. Mike Kristula [chief, Section of Field Service], Dave Galligan [associate professor of animal health economics], and Billy Smith [assistant professor of medicine] run the course and do an outstanding job.

Students—there are about 10—who enroll in the production-medicine course have access to every record—crop selection, harvesting, quality, feeding costs, calf rearing, herd health and housing, everything—they learn how to analyze all the records under faculty supervision. Then they present to the faculty their findings and suggestions for improving the program. The students work as a group, don’t pull any punches in their report, have to defend their proposals, and learn more about dairy health and productivity than anybody, anywhere. It is a wonderful asset and it is a pity that more students don’t avail themselves of the opportunity.

The other is the swine unit—it’s a model of what a modern, humane swine facility should be and it has done an enormous amount to increase (continued on page 6)

Construction during Dean Kelly’s Tenure

- Laboratory of Germ Cell Biology and Animal Transgenesis at NBC
- Space for the Confocal Microscope in Philadelphia
- Laboratory renovations in Quadrangle buildings and in Ryan Hospital
- Rosenthal laboratory renovations
- Ryan Hospital laboratory renovations
- HVAC renovation at NBC 2002–2004
- Marshak Dairy
- Construction of Richard S. Reynolds, Jr. Comparative Orthopedic Laboratory at NBC
- Student dormitories and Alumni Hall renovations
- New swine facility
- Scott Equine Sports Medicine Building
- Fairchild Aquaculture Building
- Groundbreaking for the Teaching and Research Building, 2004
- Further renovations at New Bolton Center

In 1994, School Board of Overseers member Christine Connelly (l), and Dr. Kelly accept a check from “A Weekend in Old Saratoga” representatives, Mrs. John R. Landan, Jr., and Mrs. Lawrence E. Ensor, Jr. (r).
In mid-February, President Amy Gutmann and Interim Provost Peter Conn announced the formation of a search committee to advise on the selection of a successor to Dr. Alan Kelly, Dean of the School of Veterinary Medicine, who will step down as dean on October 1, 2005. The committee is now completing the first phase of its work, information gathering, including interviews with many members of the school community. Advertisements have been placed in JAVMA, Science, and Nature. The search firm is actively recruiting, seeking nominations and interest from leaders in veterinary medicine globally. Review of the candidates’ dossiers should begin in May.

Richard O. Davies, professor of physiology/animal biology, has agreed to serve as the committee’s chairperson. Serving with him are:

Brenda Casper, professor of biology, SAS

Christine Connelly, chair, School of Veterinary Medicine Board of Overseers

Kenneth Drobatz, professor of critical care, Clinical Studies–Philadelphia

Steven Fluharty, professor of pharmacology, animal biology

Christopher Hunter, associate professor of parasitology, pathobiology

Sarah Kagan, Doris K. Schwartz Term Professor in Gerontological Nursing

Laurie Landau, alumna, Board of Overseers and Chair of the Capital Campaign

Susan Margulies, professor of bioengineering, SEAS

Heidi Reesink, V’06

Dean Richardson, Charles W. Raker Professor of Equine Surgery, Clinical Studies, New Bolton Center

Daniel Zawisza, V’06

Nominations and applications should be sent in confidence, and preferably via e-mail, to pennvetmed@spencerstuart.com, or by mail to Paula Carabelli and Jennifer Boly, Spencer Stuart, 10900 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 800, Los Angeles, CA. 90024

In 2002, Dr. Judith Rodin cuts the ribbon for the Scott Equine Sports Medicine Building. L to r, Dr. Kelly, Herbert Moelis, Christine Connelly, Dr. Rodin, Beverly Ensor, Gretchen Jackson, Roy Jackson, Allaire duPont, Betty Moran, Ellen Moelis, Irene Landan, and Margaret Duprey.

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awareness of swine medicine as a career opportunity for our students. The swine unit has also greatly improved our relationship with the swine industry in Pennsylvania, and the faculty involved (Tom Parsons [V’86, director, Swine Research and Teaching Facility], and Gary Althouse [chief, Section of Reproduction]) have done an exceptional job. These are really important educational and agricultural contributions that enhance our chances for continued Commonwealth support.

HW: The other thing that astonished me as I was going through your messages in Bellwether was that you were certainly a builder. You have done more building and renovating than anybody else.

AMK: I had the money. If you have the money, you can do many things; if you don’t have it, you can’t accomplish much. I should say that the department chairs were enormously helpful in using the resources we had available in the most judicious and cost-effective way. We increased the departmental budgets, gave departments an incentive plan to get more research grants, and allowed them to carry funds over from one year to the next. This gave the chairs more autonomy and they leveraged their funds in a very effective way to accomplish their goals. No other veterinary school has a better group of department chairs.

HW: Your biggest project is the Teaching and Research Building. When you became dean, was such a new building on your mind? Or did you realize the need once you had been dean for a while?

AMK: Leon Weiss [professor of cell biology] suggested it to me early on, but I was apprehensive of going ahead as people had talked about a new teaching and research building for more than 30 years and it hadn’t happened. I didn’t want to get into something that couldn’t be accomplished. So I had an architect look at our present classrooms, Room 13 and Classroom C. He told me they were dreadful and that there was nothing I could do to improve them. So I didn’t have an alternative. Our teaching facilities are unacceptable and we needed new laboratory space.

HW: What will this building do for the School?

AMK: It is going to greatly improve the teaching and learning environment for students. The building will provide new lecture rooms, conference rooms, study rooms, and a new library with an electronic classroom.

Eventually, it will provide 18 new lab modules, which is probably enough for the School for some period of time. Of course, half of these will be occupied by the Medical School for four to six years. I think there will be some disappointment among the researchers when they realize that there will be only nine new lab modules available when the building opens. We need more but had to enter into this arrangement with the Medical School to get the building constructed. Early on, the University did not believe we could raise the funds to construct the new building by ourselves. We have surprised them! A great deal of the credit for doing as well as we have at fundraising must go to Mark Stuart and the Development Office; they have done an exceptional job and have shown how valuable a development office can be to the School.

HW: I understand that you wanted to put an infectious disease lab at New Bolton.
AMK: It hasn’t happened because it’s so expensive to build research labs. But I remain hopeful as we are exploring the possibility of putting modular laboratory units at NBC. They are far less costly than a permanent building. If we can put these up at New Bolton Center we could build an infectious disease research group out there that would be an enormous advantage for the School.

HW: Has the curriculum changed during your tenure as dean?

AMK: Jeff Wortman [V’69, Associate Dean] has worked very hard to effect a change, but we haven’t accomplished the major change I was looking for. Students spend far too much time in passive learning, sitting, listening to teachers talk. It is very difficult to change the curriculum, but I remain convinced that the students need to have a much more active educational experience and they need to learn the basic sciences in the context of clinical medicine. It provides the framework upon which students can integrate and remember a deluge of basic information. We all have to understand that our primary goal is to teach students the capacity of critical thinking in a clinical environment.

HW: Do you think the teaching of veterinary medicine needs to change? Do different subjects need to be taught, a different emphasis or delivery of veterinary medicine?

AMK: We have a good model in the core elective program; it gives us the flexibility to introduce new subjects when we need to. This is necessary as veterinary medicine is a very dynamic profession that keeps breaking into new fields. Nevertheless, I still believe that every student should get a broad introduction to comparative medicine, to understand the basic principles of how mammals, birds, fish are put together and function normally. This is core information that every student should have no matter what they end up doing. They shouldn’t specialize early on—that can come later in the curriculum via electives.

HW: We have specialization now. Will that lead to fragmentation, away from the general practitioner?

AMK: I think this is actually a boon for the practitioners because they can refer cases that they can’t handle to specialists. I think that this represents a huge advance in the quality of animal care. So, that’s going to continue, and if you look to the future, by 2050 the figures are that we will probably need nine new vet schools. Just looking at the growth of the population, the predictions are of a 50 percent increase in the population in the next 50 years. Almost all the growth will be in suburbia, more suburban sprawl. This means that the demand will be for companion-animal care, so there is going to be an enormous challenge for the profession to meet the needs of an expanding population demanding ever more sophisticated companion-animal care. This is why I was saying that the profession needs to be clear in what it is asking the public to support. It must be to advance infectious disease research, public health, food safety, etc. I think that support for companion-animal medicine has to come increasingly from the private sector, and I think this can be accomplished.

HW: Feed and drug companies and veterinary corporations?

AMK: Yes, corporations are going to increasingly control veterinary practice; clinical practice is going to change from being primarily a cottage industry.

The challenge for veterinary academia is figure out how it is going to provide the resources to support the equivalent of nine new schools. Presently 27 states provide the resources for veterinary education for the entire country. That’s a problem. Are nine more states going to pick up the tab for nine new schools of the quality of Penn? I shall be surprised.

Per student, veterinary education is probably the most expensive professional education there is: You have to provide hospital facilities and faculty to care for so many different species. In view of this, we are faced with the possibility of more offshore schools or schools in the U.S. that have very limited facilities, that rely almost entirely on tuition dollars, and that send students out to local practices for their clinical training. I worry about this, for it takes experience, patience, and dedication by a faculty to teach students to think critically in the clinical environment. Students need the experience of grand rounds, medicine rounds, pathology rounds conducted by qualified specialists—the sorts of things that do not happen in private practice—to adequately develop their clinical skills. Moreover, there seems little chance for clinical research in this type of school. That’s important to the quality of education. If you are going to have a school that has any vitality, you have to have a vibrant research program.

HW: Veterinary medicine has to think about that then.

AMK: There are real worries for the future. We need more companion-animal practitioners and lab-animal veterinarians; we need more researchers, we need more public health specialists. The support is going to have to come from different sources. It is a huge challenge, but I am sure we can succeed.

In closing, I should like to say how much fun it has been in the Dean’s Office for the past decade and how much I appreciate the support I have received from the faculty and so many cherished friends of the School.