



1-1-2006

Dean's Message: Looking Ahead

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Looking ahead

I cannot imagine a greater honor than being chosen to lead this important, venerated institution. I love the grand doorways, the old bricks, the smell of history and glorious achievements, and the carved plaques gratefully acknowledging those whose greatness echoes where we walk.

The School's faculty, staff and students are talented, kind and exceptionally committed to serving the mission of veterinary medicine. Ideally, the leadership of the Dean spurs these gifted people to accomplishments they never thought possible. Dean Alan Kelly's leadership has exemplified lofty, even unimaginable goals, firmly sought and achieved through vision, perseverance and implacable commitment. The School will be able to use this remarkable foundation to launch our future plans. I have begun to shape my plans by seeking the wise counsel of all the School's key groups, as well as our graduates and wonderfully committed friends and professional colleagues. These initial discussions are creating blueprints for a focused but ambitious set of goals. Undoubtedly, my vision will develop and become more informed, just as our School and profession will change in the next few years. The challenge is to take advantage of these developments so that we use them to serve us, the University, the profession and society.

The mission of veterinary medicine is multifaceted and rapidly—even explosively—transforming. We must not only represent veterinary medicine well, but push for increasingly wider societal impact. One important task of the Dean is to educate policymakers about the crucial contributions of veterinarians. Our School is very important to our profession—and our profession is vital to society in ways that many do not realize. As Dean, I look forward to taking every opportunity to broaden the public's understanding of veterinary medicine.

At the foundation of our mission is the healing connection between animals and people. Veterinarians everywhere watched the agonized response as the Hurricane Katrina calamity slowly, dreadfully, unfolded. The horrific images of a city drowning in sewage were rendered even more intolerable when we saw storm survivors being torn from their pets. Unimaginable as most of this was, for an apparently huge segment of the public, this component of the nightmare was easily imaginable.

As veterinarians, we see the best in people. Human compassion is best evinced in our tender care for those who depend on us—especially for the animals that serve us and share our homes and lives. Maybe this explains our pain when we witnessed those people and their animals being separated. We wept for the suffering and confusion of the animals, but equally for the destruction of the best symbol of our humanity. As veterinarians, we care for animals, but also for the people who care for *them*. Perhaps the only

glimmer of optimism in the storm's aftermath was the overwhelming help people offered to ease the animals' plight.

The human–animal bond is fundamentally important to our connection with the natural world. When disrupted or ignored, something dies—metaphorically, but often also literally. To be cut off from nature damages human society and the natural world alike. Veterinarians see the enormous benefits of healthy relationships between animals and people—and also the pain and unnecessary suffering resulting when that connection is damaged or lost. In our increasingly industrialized world, this disconnect is now the norm for many. Veterinarians are in a position to study, educate and develop active programs to bring animals and people back together in mutually healing relationships; if done successfully, we will be agents of enormously positive change.

As one step toward this goal, we must actively recruit veterinary students and graduate veterinarians who want to learn more about both well and unwell creatures, improve human lives through contact with animals, practice public health, and develop better means of serving agricultural practice so that people, animals and the environment benefit. I was delighted when President Amy Gutmann urged me to “harness the resources of the University for the benefit of the School of Veterinary Medicine.” In addition to appreciating the veterinary roots of the “harness” metaphor, I realize she will support the vision we must develop, in cooperation with the vast resources of the University—programs to attract and train students with diverse backgrounds and aspirations, in the model of our highly successful VMD/PhD combined-degree program.

We will revitalize our core programs and found new innovative programs that attract the world's best scholars here—both to learn and to teach. We know that we study and heal many species, but there is only one medicine. We need resources, cooperation and good ideas to foster new cross-species clinical and fundamental programs. President Gutmann's vision of cooperation among Schools is perfectly suited to these necessary connections. Joint programs between the School of Veterinary Medicine and every other School at the University of Pennsylvania are within our reach, and I am eager to work with the other Deans to begin making the best possibilities realities.

During my thirty-plus years at Penn, I have had great fun. I can't imagine that anyone has enjoyed more of the varied pleasures of solitary discovery, team achievement and difficult goals strenuously sought and successfully achieved. Since 1974, Penn is the only place I have been or wanted to be. My highest aspiration is to be the leader that our profession and our School deserve. There is greatness in the bones of this remarkable place.

—JOAN HENDRICKS, V'79, GR'80