

# Thinking Outside the Box: Penn Vet Alum Chooses a Career in Biomedicine

*Dr. Mark Pykett, VMD-PhD graduate, puts animal practice aside for a life in the lab*

BY COREEN HAGGERTY

**M**ark has an outstanding mix of knowledge and experience leading successful pharmaceutical development efforts to help companies maximize portfolio potential and capitalize on growth opportunities,” said David Bupp, president and chief executive officer of Neoprobe Corporation, upon the appointment of **Mark Pykett, V’91, GR’86** to the position of executive vice president and chief development officer for the company. (*Neoprobe News*, November 16, 2010)

Initially, after reading the above kudos from Mr. Bupp, one may be surprised to learn that Dr. Mark Pykett is a veterinarian. Indeed, he is one of Penn Veterinary Medicine’s VMD-PhD dual-degree program graduates. But instead of a traditional veterinary career in small- or large-animal practice, Dr. Pykett chose a career in biomedicine.

## A Different Perspective

“I came to veterinary school with a different perspective than most other traditional students,” said Dr. Pykett. “I was always interested in fundamental basic science, but was more interested in the innovative research and the practical applications that a combined degree program supported in translational medicine.”

Translational medicine is focused on relating discoveries made in basic science research labs and using them to develop therapies or diagnostics useful for treating human and animal patients.

“After receiving a BA from Amherst College in 1986, I began looking for an advanced degree program that tied together an appreciation of comparative biology and comparative medicine,” he said. “Penn Veterinary Medicine’s VMD-PhD program offered thinking outside of the box. I was very impressed with the integration at Penn between the Graduate School and Schools of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine,” he said.

VMD-PhD students at Penn have access to more than 500 laboratories to conduct doctoral research, while also benefitting from two world-class veterinary hospitals for clinical training.

## Opportunities to Explore

While at Penn Vet, Dr. Pykett completed his VMD coursework with his V’91 classmates, while doing double-duty at Penn’s Graduate School completing lab rotations and doctoral research with Donna George, PhD, in the Cell and Molecular Biology Graduate Group.



Mark Pykett

“Working with mentors like Dr. Richard Miselis, V’73, GR’73 (then head of the program) provided me with the guidance I needed to explore,” Dr. Pykett said. “As veterinary students we had the opportunity to explore the research side, as well as the small and large animal care experience.”

After finishing vet school requirements and completing his PhD in 1994, Dr. Pykett completed a postdoctoral program at the Harvard School of Public Health, and then earned an MBS from Northeastern University in 2000. He has served as an adjunct lecturer in cancer biology at Harvard University’s School of Public Health and on Northeastern University’s Center for Enterprise Growth Corporate Advisory Board, but the breadth of his career has included senior leadership positions at a number of biotechnology and diagnostics companies where he

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- In May 2011, the Penn Vet VMD-PhD program will have graduated 63 alumni of the VMD-PhD program.
- Approximately 25 students are currently enrolled.
- The program is in its 42nd year.
- Dr. Michael Atchison, PhD, has directed the program for 10 years. His predecessors include Ralph Brinster, V’60 GR’64 HOM’66, Richard Miselis, V’73 GR’73 and John H. Wolfe, V’82 GR’86.
- The program is the only combined degree program with support received by the National Institute of Public Health via two grants: 1) the MSTP grant shared with Penn’s School of Veterinary Medicine, and 2) Penn Vet’s NIH T32 grant for VMD-PhD training in infectious disease-related research.

VMD-PHD PROGRAM STATS

## 1990s

**Peter Vogel (V'90)** has been elected vice president of the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association.

**Lance Bassage (V'93)** has been named professor at the Ontario Veterinary College at Guelph. He will be working at the Large Animal Clinic providing both elective and emergency surgical care, as well as teaching OVC students.

**Denise McAloose (V'93)** serves as assistant clinical professor at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University, Bronx, NY and as an anatomic pathologist for the Wildlife Conservation Society – Bronx Zoo.

## 2000s

**Jill Abraham (V'03)** DACVD, currently works at the InTown Veterinary Group/Massachusetts Veterinary Referral Hospital as a dermatologist. Before her position in Massachusetts, she completed a small animal rotating internship in medicine then worked for a year at Red Bank Veterinary Hospital in Red Bank, NJ in 2004. In 2007, Dr. Abraham completed her residency in dermatology at the Matthew J. Ryan Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, PA. Dr. Abraham became board-certified by the American College of Veterinary Dermatology in the summer of 2007.

**Cailin Heinze (V'04)** has been appointed assistant professor in nutrition at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in Boston, MA. Dr. Heinze completed a three-year residency in nutrition at the University of California, Davis after graduation from University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and was recently certified by the American College of Veterinary Nutrition. Currently, she is investigating omega-3 fatty acid metabolism in psittacine birds, which include parrots, cockatiels and parakeets.

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has managed product and corporate development efforts. Along the way, he started four private biotech companies and ran three others that are publicly held.

From stem cell research to cancer diagnostics to research for innovative neurological therapeutics to serving as a diversified developer of innovative oncology surgical and diagnostic products, VMD-PhD graduates play vital roles in our society both behind the microscope and in the board room.

**Karen O'Connor (V'04)** opened Coastal Georgia Veterinary Care, her first practice, in December 2010 in Richmond Hill, GA, just outside Savannah. The practice will be dedicated to delivering full-service treatment in a spa-like, nurturing environment.

## deaths

- 1939 **James Howard Gillespie** on January 10, 2011.
- 1950 **Leonard B. Simmons** on October 5, 2010.
- 1951 **William A. "Doc" Kernick** on January 27, 2011.
- 1952 **Margaret L. Petrak** on October 19, 2009.
- 1957 **George Boyle** on December 17, 2010.
- 1961 **Andrew Cullen** on November 17, 2010.
- 1972 **Brian Silverlieb** on February 24, 2011.
- 1979 **John A. Burger** on September 19, 2010.
- 1983 **Thomas E. Soeey** on October 9, 2010.
- 1990 **Cheryl Welch-Muller** on February 23, 2011.

Have you received a promotion, gotten married, had a baby or received an award? Have you volunteered somewhere special, moved into a new building, ventured into a new business or discovered the cure for avian flu? Please share with us all of your good news to include in the CLASS NOTES section of the *Bellwether* and the [vet.upenn.edu](http://vet.upenn.edu) website. All residents, interns and fellows are also invited to share!

Forward all alumni news to Coreen Haggerty, director of Alumni Relations at [haggertc@vet.upenn.edu](mailto:haggertc@vet.upenn.edu) or write Office of Alumni Relations, 3800 Spruce Street, Suite 172 E, Philadelphia, PA 19104.

contact us

## Veterinarians Enable Change

"All veterinary students should have a keen appreciation of the options a veterinary degree can offer," Dr. Pykett said. "As veterinarians, our unique contribution is that we have the ability to enable change and to bring critical thinking to an array of problems and challenges. The degree fosters broad thinking – veterinarians have the options for diverse career paths, including running a biotech company." 