

# A Message from the Dean

Last November the American Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges, representing all the veterinary schools in the U.S. and Canada, held a conference at the National Press Club in



Washington D.C., entitled, "An Agenda for Action: Veterinary Medicine's Role in Public Health and Biodefense and the Obligation of Academic Veterinary Medicine to Respond."

I am pleased to say that the conference was largely initiated and sponsored by Penn.

The conference centered on the nature of the biological threats, either accidental or deliberate, that may affect human and domestic animal populations in North America. The role of the veterinary profession is emphasized in the executive summary: *The training of veterinarians creates a cadre of professionals who are ideally suited to respond to and counter these threats, but prompt and sustained action by the profession and its leadership is required.*

*Equally important, those in positions of leadership in the United States must recognize and nurture this capability of the veterinary profession, as it is a precious and crucial national resource.*

The call for prompt and sustained action refers to the ever increasing complexity of newly emerging, and re-emerging infectious disease, and the threat of drug-resistant pathogens.

World population growth, poverty, overcrowding, squalor, lack of health care, global warming, and our rapid transition to a global society, with a globalized food supply, all contribute to the complexity and reality of the threat. Pathogens, particularly those that in the past were brushed aside as causing bizarre diseases in far away places, are finding new niches and establishing infections in our own environment. West Nile virus encephalitis, Nipah virus encephalitis, SARS, mad cow disease, and most recently monkey pox, make this point abundantly clear as all are diseases transmissible to man.

Add to the above the threat of bioterrorism and the call for prompt and sustained action becomes urgently compelling. Since the tragedy

of 9/11, and the torment of the anthrax episodes, the government has engaged in a highly publicized defense program against smallpox but it has yet to invest heavily in the nation's public health infrastructure, in veterinary public health, epidemiology, and in research on infectious diseases of domestic and wild animals. Yet, I would predict that terrorist threats to the safety of the American food supply will create a level of fear no less destabilizing than the threat of smallpox.

The veterinary profession has a proud history of eradicating and controlling zoonotic diseases (those transmitted from animals to man) and eliminating diseases important to the health of domestic animals. Veterinarians were instrumental in removing bovine TB, equine glanders, brucellosis, rabies, and trichinosis, as threats to human health in the U.S., and in the elimination of foot-and-mouth disease, swine fever, Newcastle disease, and avian influenza as threats to domestic animals during the first half

of the 20th century.

These extraordinary contributions are largely unknown because the profession has not done enough to educate the public. Those in leadership positions in our federal and state governments must now be enlightened about how much is at risk if the veterinary profession is not encouraged and given the means to become fully engaged.

Our profession, most particularly its academic community, must work to ensure that there are adequate personnel and fiscal resources to support infectious disease research on domestic and wild animals, the source of most new and emerging infectious diseases that endanger our health and food supply. Two years after 9/11, these resources are still distressfully inadequate.

**Alan M. Kelly**

*The Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine*

A plaque in memory of **Dr. David Knight** was placed in the cardiology suite at the Ryan Veterinary Hospital. Dr. Knight's widow and their sons, Eric and Christopher, attended the ceremony.

Eric Knight, like his father, an avid bicyclist, made a special trip this spring. He and a group of friends rode more than sixty miles through Lancaster County, taking a route he and his father had planned for that day. Eric wore a sign that read "In Memory of Dad. He Planned to Ride Today."



**Eric Knight, Krystyna Knight, Christopher Knight and Dr. Gail Smith.**