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## TAKING HER LEAD

*Dean Joan Hendricks reflects on the rise of women in veterinary medicine*

BY DAVID LEVIN

Young Joan Hendricks rarely had the usual pets, since her Army family moved frequently. To fill the void, she tried to care for some of the animals she encountered, including an ailing dragonfly, a pigeon, and a baby sparrow. This early desire to understand and heal animals suggested a scientist in the making, with a particular calling in veterinary medicine.

“When I was eight, I found a dead mouse in our front yard, and I wanted to cut it open,” Hendricks recalled. “I loved animals and wanted to fix them. At the time, though, I was told that women weren’t vets.”

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Dean Hendricks spoke with Linnea Tracy, V'19, at last year's MLK Day Clinic. As Dean of Penn Vet since 2006, Hendricks has overseen classes that have been comprised of around 80 percent women.



Dean Hendricks has spent her entire career at Penn Vet, rising from VMD-PhD student to Dean. Along the way, she has drawn inspiration from mentors including Dr. Joan O'Brien, V'63 (pictured above), as well as Penn Vet students and colleagues.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), only 277 female vets existed in the entire United States in 1963. Universities were free to discriminate openly against women, barring them from studying or teaching. As a result, the veterinary profession was populated almost exclusively by men—yet this fact only seemed to steel Hendricks' resolve.

"I don't think every woman feels judged as representing all women, but I did. I thought I might change the future of women in academia if I failed," she said.

When the passage of Title IX finally made sex-based discrimination illegal in 1972, it sparked major changes at veterinary schools across the nation. The law opened the floodgates for women in the field—including Hendricks, who arrived at Penn Vet in 1974 after studying biology and psychology at Yale. By the time she earned her VMD and PhD at Penn Vet in 1980, enrollment of women in veterinary schools had already begun to climb steadily, reaching a nearly even 50-50 gender division that decade. By the early 1990s, those scales had tipped even further, with a clear majority of women in veterinary schools nationwide, according to the AVMA.

At Penn Vet, Hendricks was encouraged by "clear-headed and highly effective male mentors" as well as female veterinary pioneers, she said. Her role models included Dr. Joan O'Brien, V'63, a leading respiratory specialist who had attended Penn Vet while raising three children.

"Joan was the only female full professor when I joined the Penn Vet faculty, and we later became colleagues and friends," Hendricks noted in the Spring 2015 issue of *Bellwether*, dedicated to Penn Vet's female trailblazers. "She provided valuable insight as I researched sleep apnea in dogs, and I fondly remember many mornings carpooling to campus together."

A faculty member at Penn Vet for more than 30 years, Hendricks rose to Chief of Critical Care in the Department of Clinical Studies, and founded the School's Veterinary Clinical Investigations Center. In 2001, she became the first woman to hold an endowed professorship at the school—the Henry and Corinne R. Bower Professor of Small Animal Medicine. In 2006, she was named Penn Vet's Gilbert S. Kahn Dean of Veterinary Medicine, overseeing classes that have been comprised of around 80 percent women.

Today, Hendricks is capping off a long career that's inspired countless other female vets to find their foothold and their voice in veterinary leadership: from key roles in research, to top academic posts, to practice ownership, and beyond.



“If I have an opportunity to elevate women, I’ll take it. I’ll say to job candidates for leadership positions that you can do this, and you owe it to womankind to apply or agree to interview,” she said emphatically.

However, Dean Hendricks’ own path hasn’t always been clear or easy. She admitted being reluctant at first to even be considered for the Deanship of Penn Vet.

That hesitancy is not uncommon. In many cases, she noted, women including those in veterinary medicine need extra encouragement to apply for high-profile positions, or to step into leadership roles. Despite the fact that the vast majority of students in veterinary schools are female, leaders at many of those schools still remain predominantly male.

It’s part of a wider societal trend. For instance, in the U.S. Congress and state legislatures, fewer than 25 percent of leadership positions are held by women; in business, less than six percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are female; and in academia, less than 30 percent of university and college presidents are women, according to the Pew Research Center. Out of 30 veterinary colleges and schools in the U.S., eight women (including Dean Hendricks and two serving in interim appointments) are currently deans. Hendricks has helped get these women together to network at the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) Deans Conference in Florida, and to carpool to a second meeting in Orlando each year.

“As one of the first female deans of an AVMA-accredited veterinary school in the U.S., [Dean Joan Hendricks] has inspired diverse colleagues to embrace strategic leadership driven by evidence-based practices,” said Dr. Deborah Kochevar, Dean and Henry and Lois Foster Professor at the Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine at Tufts University. “She has been a particularly effective advocate for veterinarians in research and has served as an excellent role model for students and faculty, including women.”

“Joan has also been a staunch advocate for the value of executive leadership in the veterinary profession,” Dean Kochevar added. “Fellow deans and developing veterinary leaders have benefited from her energy and commitment to innovative education in this area.”

Hendricks credits fellow female leaders in academia with inspiring her own journey. Among them is Dr. Lisa Freeman, current Acting President of Northern Illinois University, and former Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Programs at Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine.

## HENDRICKS TO BE HONORED FOR ADVANCING WOMEN AT PENN

On April 12, Dean Joan Hendricks will be presented with the Trustees Council of Penn Women/Office of the Provost Annual Award of Recognition. Established in 2009, the award recognizes significant contributions by University faculty to advancing the role of women in higher education and research at the University of Pennsylvania. This may include increasing the presence of women in fields where they are underrepresented; facilitating the advancement of women to positions of academic leadership within the Penn community; improving the environment for female faculty; and creating avenues for professional development and recognition through the full span of a female faculty member’s career at Penn. Award nominations are made by deans, department chairs, center directors, and faculty members.



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(Top left photo) Dean Hendricks with Shannon Kerrigan, at far left, and Audrey Barker, recipients of the 2012 Student Inspiration Awards.

“Ask the average person what a president looks like, and the majority think of the men in presidential portraits that line university halls,” Freeman noted, adding that she has been “inspired and reassured” by Dean Hendricks’ presence in the veterinary profession and among higher education leaders.

In other words, she continued, the veterinary field has come a long way, but it still has a long way to go. This may be due to an enduring belief that leadership requires devotion only to work, at the expense of one’s personal life.

“We’re really hitting the reality of ‘do it all, juggle it all,’” Freeman said, noting that women may “pre-worry and check out, wondering, ‘Is there a pathway to success? Can I manage this?’”

Hendricks has addressed this struggle as Dean, working to develop future leaders while also changing perceptions of what leadership means. She teamed with The Wharton School to create a summer leadership program aimed specifically at veterinarians, with an eye to spurring female leadership. And she has served as a mentor, speaking candidly with students about the rewards and challenges of leadership.

“At one level, it’s a fairness issue. People should see themselves represented in their own leadership,” Hendricks said. “It’s also good to have diversity in leadership and general differences in style; for instance, to have a consensus style of leadership, working in teams instead of hierarchically.”

To that end, Hendricks has modeled a different sort of leader. By her example, being a leader is synonymous with balancing work and life; with encouraging and listening to others; and with reaching out to help young veterinarians see themselves in her role.

According to Julie Kumble, author of *Leaders of the Pack: Women and the Future of Veterinary Medicine*, “What makes Joan unique is that she puts these issues on the map. She’s comfortable promoting women’s leadership where others aren’t.”

By working to even the gender imbalance in veterinary leadership, Hendricks has helped shift the way leadership is seen throughout the field—a move that benefits not just women, but all vets.

Noted Kumble, “As a leader, she practices incredible generosity. She brings people along, opens doors, makes opportunities. She’s a true giver.”