

# Dr. Mattie Hendrick

*Penn Vet Class of 1978*



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Dr. Mattie Hendrick is known as a visionary thinker, noted for providing the first link between vaccination and the development of fibrosarcomas in cats. And she credits Penn Vet with welcoming and fostering her nontraditional, interdisciplinary approach—dating back to her undergraduate years at Vassar, when she was deciding whether to pursue the profession.

“I chose veterinary medicine, and I think I chose Penn Vet at the same time, because my interests had to do more with looking at animals in a comparative biology and behavior way rather than a clinical way. I came from a liberal arts background and majored in psychology. Penn Vet seemed to suit what I wanted to do,” she recalled.

While at Penn Vet, she had an “a-ha” moment during a summer internship in comparative pathology. “I knew immediately that’s what I wanted to do,” Hendrick said, adding, “Pathology even back then was taught by some of the best people at Penn Vet.” She was also inspired by pioneering Penn Vet biochemists Drs. Mary Dwight McNair Scott and Adelaide Delluva, who she described as “a strong role model for many women in the vet school.”

As a female student, “I never felt any oppression or discrimination or feeling inferior in any way,” Hendrick said. “In my opinion, we sort of dominated the class!”

She served on the Penn Vet faculty from 1985 until 2007, rising to rank of Full Professor, but she recalled inequalities

she didn’t experience as a student. “Some of it was outright, some of it was undercover,” she said. Resolute, she trained countless students and residents, headed the Laboratory of Pathology & Toxicology, and served as Director of the Histopathology Laboratory for five years.

Remembering how she came upon her groundbreaking discovery in the 1980s, Hendrick said, “I was reading many biopsies and started to see trends. I noticed that I was seeing this particular lesion over and over, what looked like a vaccination reaction. Six or seven months later, in the same sites, were these tumors,” she said. “My chairman at that point was Dr. Alan Kelly. He was very supportive of me and encouraged me to do more research in it.”

Kelly connected her with Penn’s medical school pathologists to further investigate the pattern, which led to a number of co-authored papers. Hendrick became Chair of the Epidemiology/Pathology Subgroup of the Vaccine-Associated Feline Sarcoma Task Force, a joint endeavor of the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Animal Hospital Association, American Association of Feline Practitioners, and the Veterinary Cancer Society.

Winner of the Dean’s Award for Leadership in Education, Hendrick noted that Penn Vet encourages veterinary leaders in various fields. “I really do believe Penn is more progressive than a lot of other schools. They’ve always supported people being self-starters and entrepreneurial.”