

Working  
to make  
alternative  
tracks the  
status quo

# ALTERNATIVES

IN VETERINARY MEDICAL EDUCATION



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Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights

## AVAR Joins Forces with The Humane Society of the United States

**New Veterinary Medical Association to Offer Veterinary Students More Opportunity to Participate in Animal Protection Initiatives**

The Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR) and The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) recently approved a corporate combination agreement that creates a new, powerful veterinary advocacy organization, the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA). One of the main priorities of the new association will be to offer expanded opportunities to veterinary students to participate in animal protection initiatives. The HSVMA will also expand outreach to veterinarians and veterinary technicians, with the goal of making the veterinary community more of an animal advocacy stakeholder.

“Veterinarians bring a special credibility and authority on animal issues, and I am delighted to add this exciting new operation to The Humane Society of the United States’ family of organizations,” said Wayne Pacelle, HSUS president and CEO. “For 27 years, AVAR has been an important and principled veterinary voice in animal advocacy. Now we will be able to amplify that voice and expand our veterinary-related programs dramatically.”

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HSUS president and CEO**

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“For many years, AVAR has worked with a sizable core group of dedicated veterinary advocates, but our ability to reach veterinarians throughout the nation was hampered by our limited resources,” said Dr. Paula Kislak, president of the board of AVAR. “As The Humane Society of the United

States invests more resources in veterinary advocacy and we blend our assets with them, I anticipate that we will be able to organize many more thousands of veterinarians, veterinary students and veterinary technicians in the broader cause of animal protection.” Dr. Kislak will join the board of directors of The HSUS in the near future.

The new association will continue the longstanding efforts of AVAR to press for veterinary medical school reforms that eliminate the harmful or terminal use of animals in veterinary training. HSVMA will also offer an expanded speaker’s bureau on animal protection issues to veterinary schools and pursue the establishment of veterinary student chapters at schools throughout the United States. HSVMA will continue to distribute a newsletter focusing on alternatives in veterinary training and animal protection issues to veterinary students.

The HSVMA will also continue to offer veterinary students the opportunity to gain hands-on, clinical experience through clinics hosted on Native American reservations

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## AVAR Joins Forces with The Humane Society of the United States

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and rural areas where regular veterinary services are unavailable. Approximately 700 veterinary students per year participate in this highly successful program. Additionally, HSVMA will encourage veterinary students to participate in other animal protection initiatives, such as disaster response, spay and neuter events, and advocacy for legislative and corporate reforms.

"AVAR has always worked closely, although often behind the scenes, with veterinary students who were pushing for humane reforms in veterinary training and elsewhere," said Kislak. "We believe this new association, which combines the extensive resources and contacts of our two groups, will make those efforts more visible and more successful."

The HSUS, founded in 1954, has 10.5 million supporters - one in every 30 Americans. Eleven thousand members are veterinarians. One in seven veterinarians in the United States is directly affiliated with the organization. The HSUS has major collaborative programs with the veterinary schools at Louisiana State University and Mississippi State University. AVAR, founded in 1981, has 3,000 affiliated veterinarians, veterinary students and veterinary technicians.

Both groups have long expressed frustration with the industry-biased positions taken by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). AVMA is on the opposite side of animal protection advocates or neutral on a wide range of unacceptable abuses of animals, including the slaughter of horses for human consumption, the continued use of random-source dogs and cats in research, cruelty to ducks and geese in the production of foie gras, the confinement of veal calves, breeding pigs, and egg-laying hens in tiny crates and cages.

"All too often, the AVMA sides with animal-use industries, and not with animals," said Pacelle. "How could a veterinarian, who takes a sworn oath to care for animals, not speak out against force feeding of ducks for foie gras or the confinement of veal calves in crates so small that the animals cannot even turn around? The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association will be a voice for the vast majority of veterinarians not in the employ of industries that do harm to animals."

Veterinarians, veterinary technicians, students, and other professionals associated with the veterinary field are encouraged to visit [humanesociety.org/vets](http://humanesociety.org/vets) to sign up to receive announcements about HSVMA.

# The Impetus Behind the Development of Alternatives

*by Annette Rauch, DVM, MS, and Gary Patronek, VMD, PhD*

Many factors have encouraged and enhanced the search for non-animal alternatives in education, but the most influential has been a growing ethical concern over uses of animals that involve injury or potentially avoidable death. Prior to the late 1970's, the terminal use of animals in life sciences and medical education was routine.

However, by the mid-1980's, social attitudes about animals were rapidly changing as exemplified by high profile investigations of laboratory animal mistreatment (e.g., Silver Springs monkey incident and University of Pennsylvania head injury studies), the growing recognition of pets as part of the family, and movements to repeal so-called 'pound seizure' laws in some states, for example. This changing mindset also impacted classroom settings where objections to the traditional uses of animals were emerging, from the high school classroom (e.g., Jennifer Graham's lawsuit against her high school in 1987 for not allowing her an alternative to traditional dissection) to the campuses of higher education (e.g., lawsuits, petitions, and publicly voicing objections at a variety of veterinary schools).

In veterinary medicine, one of the first reported conscientious objectors was a University of Georgia veterinary student who withdrew from the school in 1985 to avoid the third-year survival surgery labs. That same year, also at the University of Georgia, freshman veterinary students stole a university-owned dog that was to be used in a terminal third-year student lab. Ethical concerns at the University of Georgia were not limited to veterinary students. In 1985, a junior faculty member raised ethical concerns about the "sarcastic and callous attitude" of a senior faculty member, who stated "anesthesia in the turtle will be induced by the time honored and well known cephalic concussion method." The junior faculty member



*Veterinary students at Tufts University Cumming School of Veterinary Medicine prepare a dog for a spay surgery. Surgery programs which provide spay and neuter services to animals who are offered for adoption are an alternative to surgery programs that involve terminal procedures. Photo Credit: Andy Cunningham, Tufts University.*

complained that no one should "make a joke out of taking a life." Prior to these events, public objections by faculty or students to the harmful use of animals in veterinary education appear to have been rare.

The willingness to publicly oppose the harmful and terminal use of animals in veterinary training reached new levels at the University of Pennsylvania in 1986 when two third-year students filed a lawsuit against the School of Veterinary Medicine after being told they were required to participate in a nonsurvival surgery laboratory. The lawsuit ultimately ended in a negotiated settlement in which the students performed the surgery on an animal who was euthanized due to terminal illness.

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