

# AKC AND THE VETERINARY COMMUNITY

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## MEDICAL MATTERS

*This article has been approved by the AKC's Canine Health Committee and its distribution is encouraged. Copies may be downloaded at [www.akcchf.org/research/perspectives.cfm](http://www.akcchf.org/research/perspectives.cfm) ."*

A veterinarian is to a breeder what a pediatrician is to a parent. Breeders rely on veterinarians for everything from routine vaccinations to the most sophisticated treatments for exotic diseases. Yet purebred dog fanciers and veterinarians in general have too often maintained a wary relationship to the detriment of both.

Over the past few years the American Kennel Club has sought to improve the understanding of our mission by actively engaging the veterinary community in a variety of ways.

For several years AKC has offered scholarships to students enrolled in the 28 American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) accredited schools of veterinary medicine in the United States. In 2005 AKC and AKC/CAR gave 23 scholarships totaling \$160,000. In 2006-2007 the scholarship program will continue to be available to the veterinary students. AVMA through its education and accreditation committees provides assurance to AKC that its scholarship funds go to fully recognized schools whose graduating students must pass rigorous licensing examinations.

Recognizing the importance of veterinarians to the purebred dog fancy, and the necessity for mutual trust and respect, the AKC Delegates Canine Health Committee suggested to the AKC Board that a program be instituted to reach out to veterinary students. The goal was to make available information, both through a website and through personal contacts, about purebred dogs. We

learned that almost no education was available to students about breed-specific diseases. From small beginnings the Veterinary Outreach program was born and has blossomed into an important, viable resource. Through help from The Hartz Mountain Corporation additional funds have been added to the department's budget for scholarships for veterinary technicians. Applications for the 2006-2007 school year were sent to 106 schools offering veterinary technician programs. Veterinary Outreach and The Hartz Mountain Corporation have jointly distributed the AKC Complete Dog Book to all graduating 4th year veterinary students at the 28 US veterinary schools.

Starting with a small program to visit one or two colleges a year, Veterinary Outreach will visit fifteen schools and will have meetings and the AKC information booth at seven veterinary conferences by the end of 2006.

One other program has been initiated this year under the guidance of the Delegates Canine Health Committee and with the cooperation of the All-Breed Clubs Committee, Veterinary Outreach will develop programs which interested all-breed clubs can use to build greater rapport and involvement with veterinary schools in their regions. All this is done with a tiny, dedicated and enthusiastic staff, led by Debra Bonnefond and under the direction of Keith Frazier.

At the other end of the spectrum the AKC Canine Health Committee recommended that the Board of Directors establish a closer relationship with top officers at AVMA. Chairman Ron Menaker appointed the Committee's two liaisons, Dr. Patty Haines and the late Dr. Asa Mays to

represent AKC. Several productive meetings have been held. In December of last year the President of AVMA, Dr. Henry Childers and his associate Dr. Michael Chaddock, Director of Government Relations for AVMA, visited the New York offices of AKC. They met with Chairman Menaker, President Dennis Sprung, Tom Sharp, Keith Frazier, Stephanie Lane, Jim Holt, Noreen Baxter and Daisy Okas. It was an opportunity for AKC to express the concerns of the purebred dog fancy and to describe the efforts being made by Veterinary Outreach to engage students and veterinarians about the special relationship which should exist between the two communities. In addition to some eye-opening information concerning the scholarship program and other efforts in canine health, the veterinarians received a tour of AKC's beautiful collection of canine art and its impressive library.

Why is the AVMA/AKC alliance important? Because there is strength in numbers. Both groups are dedicated to the health and well-being of animals. Together they are pledged to work for better legislation, better and more informed care and research into the diseases which affect the animals we breed and which veterinarians must treat. As one example, AVMA did not know until recently, how important our contributions to canine health are to veterinary research through the AKC Canine Health Foundation.

Through its own resources AVMA can bring to bear pressure on veterinary schools to provide the courses about purebred dogs, breed specific diseases and clinical studies which will benefit breeders. The more understanding we build between veterinarians and dog owners the greater the benefits to all.