

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 6 APPROVED

**SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY AND
VETERINARY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

SUBJECT MATTER: Federal Veterinary Workforce Assessment

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

In 2009, the United States (US) Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report with recommendations to improve the ability of the federal veterinary workforce to carry out mission-critical activities. Two GAO recommendations addressed emergency response.

The first recommendation was: *“to improve estimates of the veterinarian workforce needed to respond to a large-scale foot-and-mouth disease outbreak”*.

The second recommendation was: *“to improve the ability of the federal veterinarian workforce to respond to zoonotic outbreaks in the future while also effectively carrying out routine activities”*

Between 2009 and 2011, US congressional members, agency leaders, and others were informed that civilian federal veterinarians are the only federal medical professionals that do not receive some form of professional pay. At that time the Army veterinarians received professional pay of \$1200 annually. Since then, that amount was modified and the Army veterinarians now receive more.

In 2009, groups worked with congressional members to draft bill language for professional pay. The bill was never introduced.

In April 2010, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced that there was an extreme shortage of federal veterinarians. Information was sent to the public and congressional leaders on short-staffed agencies which included three groups within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Agricultural Research Service (ARS), the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS), and the Food Safety and Inspection Services (FSIS), as well as the Department of the Army. Professional pay was part of the solutions offered.

USDA-FSIS provided recruitment incentives and decreased their veterinary vacancy rates from over 15% to less than 5% in a two year period. Unfortunately, USDA-FSIS did not continue the incentives and the vacancy rate increased to over 15% again.

In 2010, the OPM granted direct-hire authority for agencies trying to recruit more veterinarians as part of a hiring initiative. The GAO recommended a working group be formed of all federal agencies employing veterinarians and other interested groups to develop strategies to correct the hiring and retention issues. The Federal Veterinary Workforce Talent Management Advisory Council (TMAC) was established to address the impending national shortage of federal veterinarians and its ability to complete their mission critical duties, assess current and future sufficiency of the veterinarian workforce, and respond to animal health emergencies. The TAMC was advisory only and had no authority to require any action by federal agencies.

In 2012, the TMAC conducted and published the very first federal veterinary workforce assessment. The top recruitment issue was professional pay. The assessment identified gaps in the recruitment, hiring and retention of federal veterinarians. That information was provided to OPM, GAO, congressional members, and agency leaders for action, but no action was taken by agencies, because it required more funding which they didn't have.

Also, in 2012, the TMAC prepared and published another veterinary workforce document entitled: 2012 Federal Veterinary Workforce- Emergency Response & Post-Outbreak Assessment Estimates. This document assessed the post-outbreak actions and conducted Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) scenario modeling to determine the veterinarian workforce needed to respond to an FMD outbreak. The 2012 best initial estimate was that approximately 6,000 veterinarians would be needed for response to a national level FMD outbreak in addition to the 2,000 veterinarians previously identified as being available.

In 2014, congressional members again asked GAO to reassess the federal veterinary workforce with the intention of improving several areas, including veterinary pay.

In 2015, GAO and OPM recommended that federal agencies develop Critical Mission Skills and identify workforce gaps, but that was not accomplished.

In 2016, Congress to provide \$7.5 million to FSIS for recruitment and retention efforts. However, Congress did not require FSIS to report on how they used the funds.

To date, USDA has not identified and shared a detailed plan on how it will augment or train its veterinary workforce to respond to an economically devastating or highly contagious outbreak.

Without reliable estimates of the veterinarians needed or how it will augment and train its workforce, USDA cannot ensure it will have enough veterinarians to adequately respond to a large-scale foreign animal disease outbreak.

In the past two years, clinical veterinary compensation has increased significantly. This fact makes it extremely difficult for federal agencies to complete for veterinarians.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges the United States Department of Agriculture and United States Department of Health and Human Services to conduct department-wide assessments of their veterinarian workforces. Vacancies should be filled so that the vacancy rate is no higher than 5%. Balancing veterinary workloads should

be a priority to prevent burnout or worse, a collapse of inspection systems. Specialty pay should be used to increase recruitment and retention in hard to fill locations. Additional incentives for veterinarians should be provided as soon as possible to ensure federal veterinary workforce members are compensated in a manner that is competitive with current clinical practice compensation.