

**30 August 2013**

Following a meeting held on 22 August 2013 between the Joint Technical Task Team and external stakeholders on the unbundling of the University of Limpopo (UL) and the establishing of a new university incorporating the MEDUNSA campus, the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) was requested to submit their urgent input for possible inclusion in the Task Team's final report to the Minister as the task team did not include a veterinarian.

### **Establishment and location of a second veterinary faculty**

There is overall support from the SAVC for the establishment of a second veterinary faculty in South Africa. This faculty should not be in competition with the existing faculty, but should complement each other to the ultimate benefit of the entire country and profession. However, the location of such a veterinary faculty should be carefully considered both in terms of investment and focus.

Whilst the SAVC agrees with the importance of establishing this new faculty, the proximity to the University of Pretoria (UP) poses a challenge in terms of the availability of clinical cases for students. It will also lead to the movement of staff between the two faculties and adequate numbers of suitable lecturers will need to be found. One of the reasons stated for the closure of the MEDUNSA veterinary faculty was the close proximity to UP's veterinary faculty. SAVC reminds the Task Team that it cannot afford to forget this reason by setting up the new veterinary faculty too close to the UP faculty.

The new faculty could be established in another province, for instance, the Eastern Cape either at Rhodes, NMMU or the University of Transkei. Not only will this create jobs where needed (in the Eastern Cape), but it will enable local Eastern Cape students greater access to training. Emphasis should be on the provision of Primary Animal Health Care in an area (Transkei/Ciskei) where a significant portion of the country's pastoral/communal animals are to be found. If moved to UT, close to KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), then the impact will also reach southern KZN. An additional advantage of looking at the establishment of a new faculty within proximity of the coast, will be the opportunity to improve on aquaculture and other related fields/areas. Rhodes University already has an established facility and centre for aquaculture.

The new faculty could alternatively be established in North West as some money was spent a couple of years ago on refurbishing North West and it would make financial sense to look

at this as an option purely from an investment point of view. With the current economic situation, academic skills will be fairly mobile.

The SAVC notes that the task team accepted that there is public concern with all veterinary training occurring in Gauteng, and they are therefore strongly considering a third veterinary faculty in the Cape. The idea of a third Faculty seems far off at this stage and thus the decision on the second faculty, which seems almost a fait accompli, should be well considered. Veterinary training is recognised world-wide as one of the most expensive training courses. The current demand for careers in veterinary science should also be taken into account before two new veterinary faculties are considered.

### **Focus**

The task team's concern that the national herd is not getting enough attention, will be addressed by the new faculty as this faculty will focus more on a unified approach in managing production health with animal health technicians, veterinary nurses and veterinarians working as a team. Further, the location of the new faculty especially given the research focus, should aim to go beyond veterinary professions only but seek to enjoin the medical colleagues as well to foster the notion promoted by the World Animal Health Organization (OIE) of "One Health" to deal primarily with diseases at the Human Animal interface. Such an approach will help South Africa to quantum leap development in this regard in other parts of the world and would foster a joint primary animal health and primary health for humans, which are both policies implemented by both the Department of Health and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

### **Training model and facilities**

The SAVC further notes that task team has agreed that they will not adopt the current UP training model. They foresee the new faculty as having one core hospital on-site for establishment of basic skills, while all major clinical skills should be learnt in a practice environment either as veterinary practices or satellites. The use of satellites in their opinion (at least 50% of clinical training) will also answer the problem of training occurring in only Gauteng. The placement of the satellites could then be determined by the needs of a specific province.

Should the decision to proceed at MEDUNSA be adopted, it is imperative that adequate, good quality facilities should be made available to the new faculty. The renovation of the MEDUNSA veterinary clinic is however discouraged as the facility is not up to the standard of training veterinarians in this century. A new hospital should be built from scratch and have state of the art facilities to keep up with the latest trends in veterinary medicine across the world.

The proposed plan to have more off-site training in a more distributive model as adopted in the United Kingdom should bear in mind that there are fewer students on those rotations in the UK. The suggestion of the task team is to use private veterinarians for this (albeit accepted that these practices are in private ownership and therefore may not offer uniform training in terms of supervisor training, experience, and standard of facilities). There is a suggestion that perhaps it may be possible to have the entire faculty's clinical staff working at clinics off-site to mitigate against this.

Standards in training at these satellites will have to be uniform, especially when dealing with quality of staff and equipment, otherwise the distributive model will fail. The new veterinary faculty will need to have a strong quality assurance unit attached to it.

The SAVC is of the opinion that the training model is the prerogative of the institution, but to guarantee uniformity of standards in the case of more than one faculty, the SAVC has decided there will be a single registration examination for all graduates of a profession in the future. Students from the new faculty should therefore be able to meet Council requirements for registration.

### **Courses to be offered by the veterinary faculty**

The SAVC is in agreement with the courses to be offered by the new veterinary faculty, i.e.:

Diploma and bachelor degree in veterinary nursing

Diploma and bachelor degree in animal health

Bachelor in veterinary science

MSc and PhDs for all students

The training of more animal health technicians and the possible over-supply of this profession requires serious and urgent consultation with role players which must include

para-veterinary professionals. The inclusion of animal health training in the new faculty could be used as a feeder programme into veterinary training with the necessary quality controls in place. The curriculum of the new course needs to have a bias towards food production, i.e., livestock and poultry, game meat and aquaculture.

Of critical importance is that, since the State consider to supply animal hospitals as is the case with humans, all practising veterinarians have to fund their own facilities by depending on the expendable capital of their clients. While it is agreed that there still is a shortage in the disadvantaged rural areas, it needs to be emphasised that to give a professional service in these areas, it will not suffice to train more and more graduates, but they will have to be funded and equipped by the state to be able to give the envisaged required services.

### **Standards and registration**

There should be uniform Day One/Year One competencies for all faculties and graduates should be expected to meet the SAVC standards. The quality and standard of students and training should be comparable to that of the current faculty.

### **Conclusion**

1. It is our sincere belief that in order to do justice to this big decision, more consultation with all stakeholders needs to be undertaken. The decision to open up the old MEDUNSA should not be taken without having considered all possibilities.
2. The Task Team should ensure that it includes a Veterinarian in the process to ensure that all pertinent issues are well considered.
3. The Task Team to keep the SAVC informed as the investigation proceeds towards making a final decision.

The South African Veterinary Council wishes to thank the Department of Higher Education and Training for the opportunity to express their views and offer their input in to this very important decision. We believe due consideration will be given to all arguments made and that the final decision will be taken with not only the best interest of the veterinary and para-veterinary professions in mind, but above all, the best interest of the country.

