



**Julie Stafford, DVM**  
Wasilla Veterinary Clinic, Wasilla, Alaska



## GUEST EDITORIAL

# Now Is Not the Time

Let's work together to achieve better mental health and wellness for the veterinary profession.

Unless you've been living under a rock in the United States for the past 2 or 3 years, you've likely heard about the push for veterinary wellness in our profession. Work-life balance, compassion fatigue, burnout, substance abuse, depression, suicide—we see these terms and statistics in our publications and online forums, from our veterinary medical associations, and even in mainstream media. With the onslaught of negative information regarding mental health and wellness it is easy to turn the page, to let it be someone else's battle, to turn your back on a problem plaguing so many veterinarians.

Now is not that time.

## Now is not that time because this problem isn't new.

The mental health factors leading to depression and suicide within our profession are not new. This is a problem that has existed for quite some time. Speak with a veterinarian of almost any age and they will know of someone in our profession who committed suicide. Veterinarians who have been around longer know of more victims, but these tragedies don't occur during a single period in time or single stage of our veterinary careers. Whether we are exhausted veterinary students, nervous new grads, deep in the trenches, or struggling with an exit strategy, we are all at risk. Our profession has been and will continue to be at risk until we create greater awareness, gain stronger support, and facilitate better avenues for improved mental health and wellness.

## Now is not the time because this problem doesn't just affect us.

This is a problem of veterinarians worldwide. In Colombia, at the WSAVA Congress, I was able to discuss our professional mental health with veterinarians from around the world. Attendees from Mexico, Denmark, Colombia, Thailand, Australia, and many other countries all recognized the same problem. Some veterinarians live in countries where mental health is not readily recognized or treated because of education or cultural boundaries. Some do not have the financial or even physical means to seek professional mental health care due to economic factors or rural geography. But these veterinarians still deserve help and support. Let us use our exposure to these issues for the greater good. Let's reach out to others to educate and support. Let's collaborate with one another to find preventive measures and treatments.

## Now is not the time because we haven't developed a solution.

Awareness is the beginning of anything, but we still need more information about these issues. We need to understand why our profession struggles with work-life imbalance, compassion fatigue, burnout, depression, and suicide. We need to reach out to other healthcare professionals, experts in mental healthcare and wellness, to obtain more research and information so we can better diagnose this disease of our profession and find ways to both treat and prevent it.

Many veterinary groups and associations around the globe are striving to produce or facilitate this information. Associations such as the WSAVA, AVMA, and CVMA have online wellness resources readily available, as do many state veterinary medical associations. In November 2016, the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges held a

wellness summit to explore these pressing issues; many veterinary schools, such as the University of Tennessee, have developed health and wellness into a part of their curricula. There are online support groups such as “Not One More Vet,” a private Facebook page dedicated to supporting veterinarians. Even companies such as Zoetis and VetGirl have informative online resources on mental health.

So don't turn the page, or your back, on yourself or your colleagues that need you. Continue to stress the importance of mental health and wellness within our profession. Get involved at a local, state, or national level or even hop online and learn a little more about why veterinarians are at risk. Don't let this issue pass you by without making a difference. Now is not that time. **TVP**



### **Julie Stafford, DVM**

Dr. Stafford is the 2016 WSAVA Hill's Next Generation Award winner and a 2014-2015 AVMA Future Leader. The Next Generation Award acknowledges the work of a veterinarian who has graduated within the past 10 years and who has contributed significantly to the betterment of companion animals, the veterinary profession, and society at large. Winners are active in continuing education, have a strong record in community service, and work to bridge the gap between their generation and others. The 2014-2015 AVMA Future Leader-developed resource on wellness and peer assistance can be found on [avma.org](http://avma.org).