

Veterinary association created to counter corporate influence

Independent Veterinary Practitioners Association dedicated to independent practice

By R. Scott Nolen

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The ongoing corporate consolidation of veterinary practices has spurred the formation of a new organization representing the interests and needs of veterinary entrepreneurs.

The Independent Veterinary Practitioners Association was created with a mission of providing programs and services that promote the independent ownership of veterinary practices, promote the business success of veterinarian members, and preserve the professional independence of veterinarians, according to IVPA founder Dr. Don Woodman.

"Our vision is a world in which independent veterinary practitioners can acquire, own, and manage veterinary hospitals so that independent ownership of practices remains a viable and rewarding option, and where veterinarians remain at the center of leadership throughout the veterinary profession," explained Dr. Woodman, owner of a small animal practice in Safety Harbor, Florida.

Established in the spring of 2017, the IVPA is in the process of incorporating as a 501(c)(6) organization. The current membership consists of nearly 180 veterinarians plus 20 paraprofessionals and four veterinary students.

Association leadership is negotiating with potential partners to provide members with management services and employee benefits, negotiate cost savings on supplies, and develop exclusive e-commerce solutions to compete with online pharmacies, according to Dr. Woodman.

He said the IVPA is neither anti-corporate ownership nor anti-AVMA. In fact, Dr. Woodman envisions the association one day sitting alongside other veterinary organizations in the AVMA House of Delegates.

What Dr. Woodman worries about is corporate practices having an outsized influence within a historically entrepreneurial industry and putting privately owned practices at a competitive disadvantage within the veterinary marketplace.

The number of veterinary practices in the U.S. ranges from 28,000 to 32,000, according to the 2017 AVMA Report on the Market for Veterinary Services. Brakke Consulting, which tracks corporate purchases of veterinary clinics, estimates around 3,500 practices are corporately owned.



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Dr. Don Woodman, founder of the Independent Veterinary Practitioners Association

Dr. Woodman is also concerned about corporate influence within organized veterinary medicine, noting how many state VMAs offer discounted memberships to veterinarians who work for corporate entities. "We worry such agreements will have the unintended consequence of maximizing the voice of corporate interests within a VMA to the disadvantage of independent practitioners," he said.

Ralph Johnson, CEO of the Veterinary Medical Association Executives and former head of the Colorado VMA, says discounted VMA memberships are neither new nor limited to corporate practices.

"Many state VMAs have for years extended discounts on memberships to various groups on the basis of passing along administrative savings when a group of memberships is renewed with one transaction," Johnson said. "For example, as an incentive to enroll all doctors at a practice, many state VMAs discount the dues, provided all the membership paperwork is processed in a batch and with one payment.

"This same mechanism has been used by many state VMAs to enroll veterinarian faculty members at colleges of veterinary medicine."

The AVMA has provided managerial services for the VMAE since January 2018. In addition to his role with the VMAE, Johnson is director of special projects for the AVMA.

It has been suggested that the AVMA should follow the VMAs and start discounting memberships. To date, AVMA leadership has not adopted such a policy (see [sidebar](#) for the AVMA's response). "We commend the AVMA for this and hope that they continue to treat independent veterinarians and corporate veterinarians equally in the future," Dr. Woodman said.

Dr. Woodman is also concerned that the trend toward corporate consolidation will lead to a commoditization of the veterinary degree.

"We believe that the public should have viable options," he said. "Ultimately it will be the public that chooses between a corporate practice and a private practice and all that comes with each experience."

AVMA statement on discounted membership

The AVMA House of Delegates, during its regular winter session in 2018, discussed the concept of the AVMA offering discounted membership to veterinarians who work for corporate entities. The HOD recommended that the AVMA Board of Directors study membership models that are based on practice size and ownership, including the financial impact of such membership models on member services.

As an update, AVMA leadership provided the following statement on discounted membership:

"AVMA is committed to continuously adding value to membership for all veterinarians. Primary areas of focus relate to advocacy on the local, state, and national levels and the services we provide to the profession specifically in partnership with our state and allied veterinary medical associations. We also have new tools, resources, and policy guidance on relevant topics such as economics of the profession, cannabis, opioids, and telehealth in veterinary medicine. Additionally, there is the exciting work being done to provide additional services through association health plans, digital education, and more efficient access to information with our upcoming www.avma.org website redesign.

"For several years, AVMA has worked with a growing number of large national practices to provide centralized billing and payment of membership dues for their veterinary staffs. The AVMA Group Pay program offers the ability to pay one invoice for as many as hundreds of members at one time, as opposed to paying for multiple memberships on an individual basis or by reimbursing the doctors. That efficiency is what drives the value of the program, rather than a discounted price per member. This program has grown each year, and now includes nearly 30 groups and more than 4,000 members.

"A 2018 AVMA House of Delegates recommendation focused on investigating how large national practices value AVMA. AVMA conducted a thorough research study among our membership and large practice partners, industry, and veterinary colleges to better understand their current and future needs as it relates to AVMA membership and beyond. Key drivers for them include access to insurance, educational opportunities, staffing resources, and more. AVMA continues to explore how to best partner with various organizations to meet those needs in the most effective way possible."

Learn more about the [Independent Veterinary Practitioners Association](#).



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