

THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF THE CLINICAL DEPARTMENTS IN THE FACULTY OF VETERINARY SCIENCE

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The essence of Veterinary Science can be encapsulated in three categories, namely: investigation or research, cure or treatment and prevention. The ideal is a balance between these three categories to enable any continent to attend holistically to animal and human health. In the history of veterinary science in South Africa the focus moved slowly from investigation or research to cure and treatment. The Arnold Theiler and co-workers era focused on investigation or research. Tropical diseases that wiped out large populations of production animals and horses were investigated, identified and described. Once the causative agents were identified the next logical step was to cure and prevent. This led to the embodiment of the Onderstepoort Research Institute and in particular the development of effective vaccines.

Highly gifted intellectuals, the likes of Theiler, Weiss, Bigalke, du Toit, Jansen, Adelaar and de Boom, to mention but a few, elevated the pre- and paraclinical departments into world renowned centers of excellence.

In the latter part of the sixties through to the middle nineties the clinical departments grew exponentially mainly fueled by demands from the first economic sector. Then before the change in government in 1994 it was clear that our partnership with the rest of Africa in a new dispensation demanded a refocus on the paraclinical sector. A grim reminder that a balance must always be maintained between these three categories, are the severe losses recently due to the so-called “old diseases”.

Does the slight shift in emphasis away from the clinical departments, pose a threat to be dealt with? It will be a wise decision if a balance between the pre-, para-, and clinical studies are maintained in order to benefit all the sectors in this country. These studies are interdependent and active relationships are necessary to ensure our excellent veterinary education and work maintains the respect and reputation it has earned internationally.

Spending time in a clinical department is a unique and exciting privilege. The value of the exposure to the clinical or final stage of disease will give the student with an investigative mind a much better means to prevent and manage the causative agents and factors. The skill of interpretation, which is cultured in a clinical environment, has tremendous value in allowing the prevention of disease at an early stage. Further to this there can be few pleasures greater than the knowledge that through one's efforts nature is helped on its way.

The future role of the clinical departments will amongst others be determined by intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as visionary leadership, a strong and stable economy, political wisdom and the ability to retain and attract personnel that is willing and able to make a difference.

*“You can do what I cannot do. I can do what you cannot do. Together we can do great things.”-
Mother Theresa*