

BRIEF HISTORY OF BIRTH AND GROWTH OF ONDERSTEPSPOORT FACULTY OF VETERINARY SCIENCE

INTRODUCTION

1. The Faculty of Veterinary Science at Onderstepoort over the past 100 years has been shaped by several common influences throughout its existence including:

- Response to increasing student numbers
- Shortage of facilities and academic staff
- Perceived high cost of training of veterinarians
- Renewal of curriculum
- Research output

and later

- Demographic transformation
- Internationalisation

became a priority.

2. These are not unique to SA but are generic issues you find that shape most veterinary schools all over the world.

3. I will briefly discuss the main highlights of the gestation of the Faculty followed 3 distinct periods (eras) in its history. Due time constraints I will only summarise the most salient and interesting information and concentrate on the major events.

GESTATION OF FACULTY (1901 – 1919)

4. The earliest reference to veterinary education in SA dates back to **1901/02 when the Transvaal Department of Agriculture** was formed and it was suggested that a “Veterinary College” for SA be established.

5. This may not have been the first attempt as already in 1886 Jotello Soga, a Xhosa from the eastern cape, qualified as the very first South African veterinarian graduating from the University of Edinburgh, confirming a relationship in veterinary training that was already established.

6. The history of Faculty was **closely linked to that of the Onderstepoort Veterinary Institute (OVI)**. Soon after the founding of the institute by Sir Arnold Theiler in 1908 it became clear to him that there was an urgent need for the training of veterinarians in SA with its unique diseases and challenges.

7. **In March 1914 Sir Theiler had the first opportunity to present his ideas to a State commission on Higher education**, then known as the Universities Commission, and later in **1914 to the Senate of the Transvaal University College (TUC) under University of South Africa, that later became the University of Pretoria.**

8. In 1919 further representations to TUC was made and the Council then approved the establishment of a Faculty of Veterinary Science. Lengthy negotiations followed that involved the TUC, the University colleges of Johannesburg, Stellenbosch and Grey University College. It was agreed that the Faculty be established at the TUC but that the first two years of a 5y course could take place at any University college with the necessary infrastructure and the last three years at Onderstepoort.

PERIOD 1 (1920 – 1972) – UNDER MANAGEMENT OF THE OVI

9. Prof Arnold Theiler was finally appointed on 1 April 1920 as the first dean but under his terms that **all the activities at Onderstepoort must be under one Head and that no other veterinary faculty be established.**
10. The first group of 8 students received their BVSc degree in 1924. Theiler was the spokesperson at the occasion he emphasized the two-fold objective of the veterinary education: **scientifically trained graduates who are equipped to do research but also to fulfil the responsibilities of a state veterinary officer.**
11. The initial decision that the first 2 y be done at any University proved to be impractical. **UP then became the sole provider of the complete course and in 1926 it was decided that the 2nd year should also be taught at Onderstepoort.**
12. During **1920s and 1930s there was little demand for veterinary practitioners.** The emphasis of veterinary training was therefore on basic science disciplines, whereas clinical training took a back-stage.
13. **In 1927 first female student, Dr Joan Morris qualified in 1927**
14. Improved national infrastructure (roads) and increased value of animals brought about major changes in the veterinary environment late **1930 – early 1940. This was the start of private practices and sudden shortage of vets resulting in increased student numbers, greater emphasis on clinical training,**
15. The original buildings at the OVI (i.e. across the road) became totally inadequate as student numbers increased and the institute expanded. In 1950 funding was made available for building of a new complex on the opposite side of the road of the OVI. In **1952 the main building was completed and the others in 1954 at a cost of 450 000 pounds. This was the Faculty's first own facilities**
16. **In 1962 the quota of students was increased to 45**
17. In the same year the **annual Sir Arnold Theiler Memorial lecture** was introduced which since then has attained international status being delivered by an international expert on special invitation such as the nobel prize laureate **Prof Peter Doherty in 2009**, the only veterinarian to receive a nobel prize.

18. **In 1963 a MMedVet postgraduate** degree was implemented to span the gap between the BVSc and the DVSc degree at that stage).
19. The fact that the Faculty was subject **to control by UP, the OVI and the Department of Agriculture became increasingly problematic** and the appointment of staff became a bone of contention and by 1957 staff shortages were more critical than ever.
20. Nine deans, including Prof Theiler served during this period. Prof Hofmeyr was the last Dean of this era and led the transition of the Faculty to its next period. This period did provide certain advantages to the Faculty. In the first place it was part of a very famous institution that became internationally renowned for its breakthroughs and advances in the control it made on many animal stock diseases and its research output.

PERIOD 2 (1973 – 1998) – FULLY FLEDGED UP FACULTY

21. The **1st of April 1973 was a turning point** in the history of the Faculty when it was finally decided that UP would take over full responsibility for an independent Faculty.
22. A crisis now loomed due to movement of **4 Departments from the OVI to Faculty and a further the doubling of student numbers (90) in 1976**. This triggered a new debate whether the existing facilities should be expanded or a new campus built. Interestingly the then Dean, Prof Hofmeyr was in **favour that the Faculty be relocated to a site next to the CSIR** and managed to get the support for this position from both the Faculty and University Council – this was turned down by the Minister of National Education.
23. In spite of physical constraints significant changes to the academic programme were implemented and the BVSc course **was extended from 5 to 5.5 years**.
24. **In 1977 training of veterinary nurses** towards a diploma (Dip. Med. Vet) was initiated
25. **In 1980 a second veterinary Faculty** was established within the Medical University of Southern Africa (MEDUNSA) with the purpose to increase ethnic diversity in veterinary training– this will be discussed by Prof Morkel Terblanche.
26. Between **1983 and 1992 the Faculty experienced major renewal and growth of the physical facilities** led by Prof Le Roux and primarily by Prof Coubrough occurred. This included Sir Arnold Theiler Building that was officially opened in 1987, a new building for path and VPH inaugurated in 1988 and in the same year work started on the Veterinary Academic Hospital that opened in 1992. On completion of the total programme at an estimate of R 117 million the University of Pretoria could boast with one of the most attractive and functional veterinary campuses worldwide and certainly the leading school in Africa.
27. **The first OTW students trained at Onderstepoort were Dr Hess and Dr Moosa, that respectively, qualified in 1985 and 1988.**
28. Other developments during this time were:

- Further Increasing programme from 5.5 year to 6 y in the late 90's and development of new curricula and study guides for all courses
 - Computerisation of the entire campus
 - Implementation of a research and ethics committee
 - Introduction of research-based MSc and PhD programmes
29. The 5y period from 1993 to 1998 was then dominated by the negotiations on the amalgamation of the two veterinary faculties in the country. The councils of the two universities and the National Department of Education supervised the negotiations.
30. Three deans served during this period of which Proff C F B Hofmeyr (9 y), Le Roux (4y) and B Coubrough (12 y)

PERIOD 3 (1999 – CURRENT) – NEW AMALGAMATED VETERINARY FACULTY

31. During the period **1999 – 2005** veterinary training went through considerable turmoil **during the process of amalgamation**. Prof Nick Kriek was appointed as the first Dean of the new amalgamated Faculty and commenced his term in March 1999.
32. The **new Faculty came into being at the beginning of July 1999 and was positioned as a National asset** that had to attend to the needs of the broad South African community given the lack of access to tertiary education and veterinary services that prevailed in many sections of the population before 1994.
33. **Largely driven by financial constraints**, an in an attempt to access sufficient funds from the Department of Education, **the curriculum was repackaged into a 3 + 4** configuration, the first 3 y being a BSc Veterinary Biology degree offered by the Faculty of NAS and a 4-year BVSc professional course on the Onderstepoort Campus. Ironically at the time of implementation the funding formula of the Department of Tertiary education was changed and no financial benefit was obtained.
34. **Amalgamation proved to be a major transition and it took the best part of 5 years to finalise**. In keeping with international trends, the number of faculty departments were reduced to five. **At the end of the amalgamated process the Faculty Staff comprised 350 people of which 100 were academics**.
35. **A visitation by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 1999** identified a number of critical issues in the Faculty that impacted on its future activities, both veterinary and veterinary nursing. **The major issues were over teaching, a totally inadequate research output and the total isolation from the mainstream of veterinary science**. The outcome, however, did ensure **continuation of the recognition of the BVSc degree for registration purposes with the RCVS for first time recognition by the Australian Veterinary Boards Council and by the Malaysian authorities**.
36. The new political dispensation allowed free movement not possible in the previous decades. Networking with other Faculties and research institutions was established and formalized and included Veterinary School in Oslo, the School of Veterinary

Medicine of the University of Utrecht, the College of Veterinary Medicine in California Davis and the Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique.

- 37. The period following 2005 was led primarily by myself, followed by Prof Abernethy in 2015 and Prof Naidoo the current dean and is characterized by progress on goals set by the Faculty in its Faculty Plan and included *inter alia*:**
- Improved salary scales for veterinary academic staff and for specialists
 - Allocation of additional funds by the Department of Education under the banner of competitive earmarked funds for veterinary training towards clinical training
 - Additional student resident accommodation and creation a post graduate facility
 - The reinstatement of a single degree 6y training programme revised to take in account the latest trends in veterinary training – more specifically core-elective training and the achievement of day one competencies
 - Establishment of community veterinary clinics, one at Hluvukani near Orpen gate of KNP and the other at Mamelodi campus
 - Restructuring the 2y veterinary diploma to a 3y degree and the development of a veterinary nursing academic programme
 - Revision of the admission policy of the Faculty to ensure the increase intake from other than white ethnic groups and to already admit students from school
 - Measures taken to increase research output and impact of its research
 - Increased student intake - from 90 to 120 in 2000, to 135 in 2005 and 190 (2013) per year. To accommodate the last increase in student numbers funds were allocated by the skills development fund to modify the current lecture rooms facilities, to create a skills development lab, a multipurpose laboratory and a new student administrative facility (the Lesedi complex), to provide modifications to the OVAH and additional student accommodation.
 - Provision of new wildlife facilities that will inaugurated this year and focus on wildlife economy
- 38. In 2006 the Faculty received its first full accreditation visitation by the SAVC.** The visitation was done in accordance with guidelines as determined by the global accreditation initiative and with those of the European Association of Establishments for veterinary training. The visitation was done in collaboration with the RCVS and Aus Vet Board Council. **This was followed by the second full visitation in 2013.** Both these visitations were successful. The Faculty is currently preparing for its 3rd full visitation.
- 39. The Faculty was ranked 30th, 37th and 43rd in 2017, 2018 and 2019,** respectively according to the Shanghai Rankings for global rankings for academic subjects and in **2019 43rd on the QS World University rankings.** These are great achievements.

CONCLUSION

40. Typically, demographic, environmental, technological and economic are the main factors that influence the future of veterinary education. But more recently transboundary, emerging and re-emerging diseases; global animal and public health issues, and the convergence of animal, human and environmental health have become important considerations. In my presentation at the centenary celebration of the OVI in 2008 on Veterinary Education in Africa: Current and future perspectives I concluded that it is impossible to train veterinarians to address all the complex needs of the various sectors of society and that cognizance needs to be taken:

- That to remain relevant education must prepare veterinarians for future needs, be relevant to societal and political needs, and that there is a changing emphasis on global animal and public health issues
- A firm decision to broaden the scope and context of veterinary science education is fundamental in preparing the profession to navigate the future transition, just think of the 4th Industrial revolution and to enable it to strengthen its position in society

I recommended

- There must be regional collaboration and partnerships and participation in global accreditation initiatives in achieving these objectives

Best wishes to the Faculty on its next 100 y. Let us continually strive towards the “Spirit of Onderstepoort” as defined by Sir Arnold Theiler

‘ that ideal of service, the conscientiousness of endeavor, that pride in a task, that confidence of success in the face of difficulties