

A World in Flux

by DIANE R. CRAIG, DVM, DIPLOMATE, ACVS

Happy New Year! I am looking forward to an exciting year for the SCVMA. I hope this is a busy and prosperous year for all of us in Southern California. My family and I participated in the hoards of humanity (over 1 million people) in New York City to watch the ball drop in Times Square for New Years Eve. As we stood crushed in pedestrian traffic jams, we experienced the excitement of the New Year up close and personal. This new year will bring many challenges to our profession, but the top three for us in southern California are work force issues (*where will all the new veterinarians and technicians come from??*), technology (*how do you copy a digital radiograph???*) and information management (*or what to do when the internet is down again!!!*).



According to a recent update from UC Davis we have a severe shortage of veterinarians in California. They estimate we need 700 to 750 new veterinarians every year and we are facing a shortage with no improvement expected. California has 17 veterinarians per 100,000 people, which falls way short of the national average of 27 and Los Angeles County is worse yet at 10 veterinarians per 100,000 people. Many authorities including the National Research Council feels the shortage is due to lack of increases at the university level. All 28 veterinary schools are at capacity with only one new college, Western, and an ever growing national demand for veterinarians. U.C. Davis reports that they increased the class size this year from 122 to 131 and have plans to increase to 160 in the next few years. The UC Regents are exploring a second veterinary college at U.C. San Diego to meet the growing demand. That would be two new veterinary schools in our southern California area. The increase of specialists in practice has created a shortage at the teaching level which poses a huge problem to educating the increased class size as well as the interns and residents. At the recent ACVS business meeting, the shortage was addressed by a heated debate on allowing European trained ECVS surgeons to supervise training of new surgery residents. In practice we all feel the shortage of available trained veterinarians and we all know the stress of being understaffed.

Technology 101: The most dramatic change in our professions and our lives has been the internet. The rapid distribution of ideas and information has fueled the development of hundreds of new products and technologies available to veterinarians. Paperless practices are becoming the norm and are allowing us to be more efficient in the work place. The price we pay for this new technology is suffering the learning curve of voice activated software, and enduring the inevitable glitches of software and hardware crashes, not to mention new legal issues of record keeping. Digital radiology has been the single best improvement in the last 20 years, but the enhanced images confuse us with trying to interpret amazing details that we never saw before and the added stress of trying to share incompatible digital formats information. Each of these new techno toys challenges us to select the most cost efficient and productive ones for our individual practices and, at the very least, it creates a demand to keep up with the latest that technology can offer us.

The internet has given us rapid access to information that helps us in management, technology and patient care. Our challenge is to use it wisely. Patient care information is available on websites like the Veterinary Information Network (HYPERLINK "<http://VIN.com>") which allows us to access the latest treatments and dialog about any disease by practitioners and specialists around the globe at a moments notice. The journals we used to receive in the mail are now emailed to us for online reading such as HYPERLINK "<http://www.jaaha.org/>". The specialty organizations like ACVS are replacing the costly mailed information with email correspondence by the request of 90% of the members. Information for providing the most current treatments or improved techniques on emerging diseases is available at the touch of a key, instead of searching through journals or textbooks.

Images from digital radiographs, MRIs, EKGs and ultrasounds can all be transmitted via email for evaluation. The internet has virtually reduced the size of the world to one computer. Clients also have access to chat groups and personal blogs where they obtain information about veterinary medicine or share their individual personal experiences with our profession. If you wonder what your clients are reading and saying you should browse some of the popular websites such as HYPERLINK "<http://vetmedicine.about.com/>", or Google search websites that are commissioned to provide diaries of the lives of veterinarians such as HYPERLINK "<http://petpeeves6003.spaces.live.com/>". There are thousands of sites out there providing the pet owners with an inside look at every aspect of the veterinary profession.

Are you keeping pace with the advances in our profession? How can the SCVMA help you with these issues? One way is to help you stay connected to the local veterinary community by participating in an SCVMA list serve that allows dialog between veterinarians in your area about issues that we all face. We would like to move towards email communications instead of costly mailings. We have moved our website and are in the process of upgrading and taking daily control of the website features. We will continue to offer the search engines but in addition over the next year I hope to develop online links to interesting sites that will help you stay current with the issues that affect all of us locally and globally. We will work to get the Pulse online and continue to offer updates about continuing education opportunities.

Like it or not, the internet has reduced the size of our world. Information from all over the world is instantly available to us, which creates a responsibility to utilize and incorporate advances into our daily lives. Look for the new website to enhance your connection to the Southern California veterinary community.

Diane R. Craig, DVM

Balancing Act...

Dr. Diane Craig, 2007 SCVMA President, Takes the Helm

New SCVMA President Dr. Diane Craig ascribes to a simple but essential philosophy in her personal and professional life: “I think the secret to combining a rewarding career with a great family life is balance,” she says. It’s a philosophy custom-made for a woman who wears a lot of different hats: surgeon, businesswoman, wife, mother, coach, active leader in the SCVMA.

Dr. Craig is the owner of Veterinary Surgical Specialists in Tustin, and one of the founders of Advanced Veterinary Specialty Group, a unique hospital made up of a “coalition of individual specialty practices.” When she’s not performing surgery on police dogs, sled dogs, and other canine performance athletes, she is often on the road, traveling the country to cheer on her three children who play club sports at a high level. With such a busy schedule, balance is crucial: balance, and a good sense of humor.

Dr. Craig playfully describes herself as a “Valley Girl,” though her early childhood was actually spent in the Sunset District of San Francisco. There, she lived in a foster family of ten children, all of whom she remains in contact with to this day.

At the age of 13, she moved to Woodland Hills, a turning point in her lifelong involvement with animals. “When we moved to Woodland Hills, it

was like the country,” she says, “So we immediately loaded up on pets!” That’s no exaggeration: as a teenager, Dr. Craig had, in addition to the usual cats and dogs, rabbits, goats, mice, and birds. And, she adds, “They all had lots of medical needs.”

Soon, she took an interest in horses which, of course, were considerably more costly to keep than, say, a dog or a mouse.



So, to support her horses, she took jobs, all kinds of jobs, so long as they involved caring for animals: “I worked for grooming kennels, show dog kennels, I did pet sitting, I cared for my neighbors’ pets.” Before long, she made her way to a veterinary practice: “In my

junior year of high school, I started working nights and weekends for The Emergency Animal Clinic in Sherman Oaks, one of Los Angeles’s first emergency-only veterinary clinics.” It was then she decided to become a veterinarian because, as she says, “I thought the work was so rewarding.” Rewarding, and hectic. As she recalls, “The practice was very busy and the specialty of critical care was in its infancy.”

HANDS-ON TRAINING

Dr. Craig would soon get even more hands-on experience, prior to starting her formal education. After graduating from high school, but before

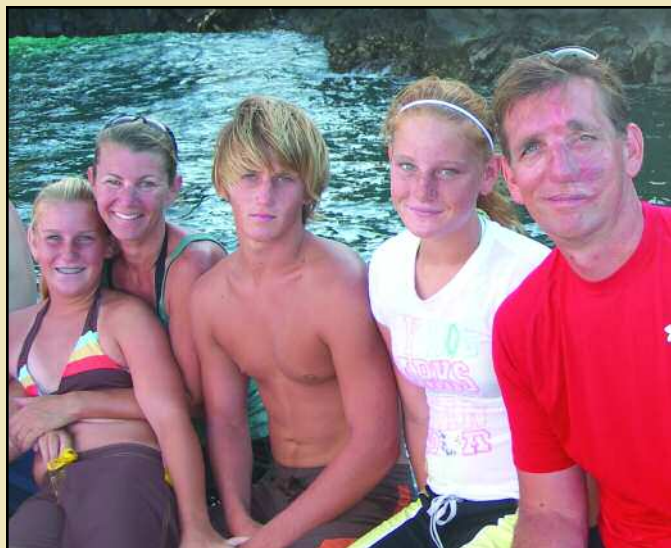
entering college, Dr. Craig went to work training standard bred racehorses. She started at Hollywood Park, then worked at Del Mar and Los Alamitos before heading north to San Francisco's Golden Gate Fields, and Cal Expo in Sacramento.

After two years at the racetrack, it was time for college; six months at Pierce, then a transfer to U.C. Davis, where she would earn her DVM, in 1983. Upon graduation, Dr. Craig headed back east to Cornell's School of Veterinary Medicine for a one year internship, followed by a three-year residency

"I think the secret to combining a rewarding career with a great family life is balance."

in large animal surgery. She also continued her work with racehorses, at tracks in New York and New Jersey. It was an important time personally as well: it was there, during her residency, that she met the man who would become her husband, Dr. Rich Pankowski, an equine surgeon who is now the manager and administrator for Veterinary Surgical Specialists.

An opportunity for Dr. Pankowski brought the couple back to California. He was hired to work at the equine surgical practice at Los Alamitos race track. Meanwhile, Dr. Craig took a job at a mixed animal practice in Hollister, which would ultimately have a significant impact on the future course of her career.



Pankowski Family (l to r): Daughter Annie, Dr. Craig, son John, daughter Alison and husband Rich.

farms then springing up in the hills outside San Jose. But her interest began to shift toward small animals. As she says, "I enjoyed the successes of small animal surgery more and more."

Over time, she says, "I started changing over to small animal surgery exclusively. I passed the ACVS surgery boards in 1991, became a partner of the Veterinary Surgical Specialists, and have been a small animal surgeon here in Orange County ever since."

SURGICAL SPECIALIST

Dr. Craig would, in time, not only become the sole owner of the Veterinary Surgical Specialists, she would spearhead a new model for veterinary care: "I partnered with other veterinary specialists in the development of the Advanced Veterinary Specialty Group, a large multispecialty group with each specialty practice operating independently," she says.

Profiled by Pulse in the August, 2000, issue, the AVSG is a cooperative hospital made up of independent specialists who own and operate the hospital collectively. At the time AVSG opened, Dr. Craig said she knew of just two other hospitals like it in the entire country.

As for the Veterinary Surgical Specialists, Dr. Craig and her team have a special interest in the most active—and, most injury-prone—of small animals: "Our practice works on police dogs, sled dogs, racing dogs, and agility dogs," Dr. Craig explains. It's work that often harkens back to her early days working at racetracks. "I spent a lot of



Dr. Craig views digital radiographs in her surgical suite. The practice implemented digital radiography in 2005.

At this time, she was still very involved with large animals: "I did ranch calls and remember driving off-road through pastures to get to the cattle herd to treat down cows and pull dead calves in the middle of the night," she recalls. She also worked on some of the very first llama, ostrich, and alpaca

continued next page

years working with lameness evaluation on racehorses and performance horses,” she says, “I brought that interest to canine performance evaluations.” Specifically, she says, “We have incorporated lameness evaluation techniques including scintigraphy, CT, MRI, and gait analysis into the canine performance evaluations.”

Ultimately, Dr. Craig finds she can do more for small performance animals than she ever could for large ones: “Arthroscopy and joint stabilizations and total hip replacements allows us to help out the

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practice, I have seen the technology and information explosion that has resulted in advancements in diagnostics and therapeutics, and this is especially true for the canine performance athlete. Many

non-invasive procedures have been developed to shorten surgical time and trauma, many of which require advance training and equipment.” At the same time, she adds, “Often the

technology changes so fast that it is almost impossible to stay current in all aspects of veterinary medicine.”

That is why Dr. Craig is so enthusiastic about the Internet as a tool for exchanging crucial information: “The sharing of case reports and information about diseases and treatments has escalated since the advent of web-based case publishing.”

That leads to one of her major goals for the coming year as President of the SCVMA. “Things are changing so fast in medicine and technology that the SCVMA has a critical role in serving the community,” she says, pointing to the opportunities afforded by the scvma.org website. “I would like to see the website become more functional and user-friendly to the consumer as well as the veterinarians and veterinary students,” she says.

Specifically, Dr. Craig says, “The internet allows rapid dissemination of information and has brought the veterinary specialty world into close contacts with advances in veterinary medicine. I would like an efficient email system that would allow the general practitioner information updates about new medications and treatments. I would like to have links on the website to outside websites that can provide useful information to veterinarians looking for current information on diseases.”

Upgrading the website is just one of the ways she hopes to “See more veterinarians use the services of the SCVMA to assist them in their professional development.”

Overall, Dr. Craig says, “I see the SCVMA as a service organization providing education, assistance, and communication to the veterinary community.” Emphasis on communication: “My hope is to bring the veterinary community together in Southern California; improved communication is a goal for the coming year.”



canine athlete in ways that just are not available in the equine athletes.”

Over the years, she has seen extraordinary advances in her field, advances that have extended the careers of performance canines. For example, she says, “The anterior cruciate ligament injury in sled dogs used to be career ending. Now I have several that have had surgery and have returned to racing. I have a police dog that does narcotics work that had an MRI and spinal surgery and has gone back into training.”

She goes on to say, “The last few years have seen the expansion of canine physiotherapy and rehabilitation as another tool for returning athletes to competition.”

HIGH-SPEED CONNECTIONS

All the advances sometimes make it hard to keep up. As Dr. Craig says, “In the last 23 years of

continued on page 20

FAMILY MATTERS

“Goals” are highly valued in Dr. Craig’s family. All kinds of goals. For example, her son John, who is 17 years old, plays hockey for the AAA Ice Dogs, while both her daughters, 13 year-old Alison and 12 year-old Annie play for the Anaheim Lady Ducks. “The kids all play multiple sports, club sports,” (including softball and soccer, which Dr. Craig has coached) and they play “at a level that requires us to travel in the United States and Canada.” The Lady Ducks recently finished third in nationals in Buffalo, New York, and “We will be in Arizona, San Jose, Connecticut, and Alaska. Softball took us to Nationals in Bloomington, Indiana,” where, incidentally, Alison’s team finished third.

In addition to all that, Dr. Craig also serves on a number of non-profit organizations, and is the

President of a large girl’s softball organization. What with work, family, sports, the SCVMA, and more, things can get a little hectic. Again, it all comes back to balance. Six years ago, when Dr. Craig talked to Pulse about her reasons for starting the AVSG, she put it in these terms: “It’s about balance, about balancing a personal life and a professional life.”

Today, it sounds like she’s found it: “I love my job and I am lucky enough to be surrounded by a supportive team of professionals including skilled veterinary technicians and a great hospital staff. I try not to miss my children’s

games and currently work four days a week. We are a busy family with a hectic schedule but I think the secret is to keep everything in perspective and develop a great sense of humor.”

—Kevin Warner



Dr. Craig with her daughters Annie (left) and Alison (right).

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