

Young practitioners membership evaluation: A qualitative exploration

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Abstract

The overarching objectives for this research were to explore the perceptions of newly minted bovine veterinarians regarding the American Association of Bovine Practitioners (the Association), determine its salient features and benefits, and ascertain if the Association has a non-renewal issue with this population.

This was the first investigation of this sort conducted by the Association with this audience regarding these issues – the area in question was basically unexplored. The information previously available was mostly anecdotal, therefore In-Depth Interviews (IDIs), a qualitative research methodology was employed. A total of 19 IDIs were conducted with bovine veterinarians who had practiced for less than 5 years and had been a member of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners. Thirteen individuals were current members, while 6 respondents were no longer members.

Although there were a number of wide-ranging suggestions for improvement for the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, all respondents pointed out the many positive attributes of the Association. All respondents would recommend membership to the Association describing it as a community with the wisdom of age couple with the energy, independence, optimism and eagerness of youth.

For the most part, the primary reason for non-renewal of membership was leaving the practice of bovine medicine, most generally for small animal practices. It should be noted those who were working in small animal practices, did so for mainly for family reasons, location and salary.

Key words: qualitative research, stress, burnout, young practitioner

American Association of Bovine Practitioners young member investigation

Background

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This was the first investigation of this sort conducted by the Association with this audience regarding these issues – the area in question was basically unexplored. The information previously available was mostly anecdotal. Conducting research on an unexplored set of topics can be challenging. With that in mind, it was decided to approach the objectives in two phases: Phase I would be a qualitative approach, Phase II a quantitative survey. Qualitative methods are often employed to identify and determine the fundamental issues, explore the nature of those issues, and focus and inform subsequent research. The purpose

of a quantitative phase is to size and enumerate the issues that were discovered in the qualitative phase.

Phase I consisted of 13 In-Depth Interviews (IDIs) conducted with bovine veterinarians who had practiced for less than 5 years.

Executive summary

Takeaways: Non-renewal

One of the primary motivations of this investigation was to ascertain reasons for non-renewal Association membership by young practitioners. A total of 6 interviews were completed with former members. Of the lapsed members interviewed, 4 had moved to small animal or mixed animal practices; as a consequence, the respondents did not feel the need to continue their AABP membership. Overall, these respondents described the Association with positive terms. They enjoyed and valued their membership with Association. All lapsed respondents would strongly recommend membership to students in veterinary school with an interest in bovine medicine.

Two lapsed members continue to practice bovine medicine. One indicated that about 40% of the practice was bovine. However, a significant portion was with small ruminants, mainly goats and cervids. As such, this respondent belonged to the American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners. Further, she indicated if the AABP included more programming and continuing education for small ruminants and cervids, they would rejoin. Again, she held the Association in high regard.

The second lapsed member is 100% dairy. Essentially, he is a staff veterinarian working exclusively for a limited liability corporation that owns a number of dairies. He is unlikely to rejoin the Association. Formerly, he belonged to the AABP, AVMA and National Mastitis Council. Most of his continuing education and other training he feels he needs is being supplied by manufacturers who are offering curricula more tailored to his current job. In his current position he spends most of his time with employee training, writing protocols, how-to manuals, tracking trends, etc. Although he spoke highly of the Association, he indicated that AABP was more treatment-oriented and he was in more of the prevention end of the continuum. As staff veterinarian, he was the primary contact with the pharmaceutical and nutrition companies and was involved with far more herd and general management than treating sick cattle.

With that being said, non-renewal of membership could not be attributed a fundamental dissatisfaction with the Association. As previously mentioned, some of the unfulfilled needs were in the areas of small ruminant content and treatment versus the veterinarian as manager.

Takeaways: features and benefits, reason to belong

According to the respondents interviewed, the salient features and benefits and reason to belong are numerous.

- The Association, in all cases, is highly regarded. The Association is “the source” of deep knowledge and continuing education.
 - ◆ It was described as “resource rich”.
 - ◆ The Association keeps the membership informed on legislation that affects the industry and veterinarians.
- For some, it offers a psychological sense of community. There are feelings of kinship, camaraderie and support.
 - ◆ The Association is a binding force for “cattle veterinarians”.
- The Association is, in part, a source of identity for young practitioners.
- All respondents would strongly recommend veterinary students to become members of the Association because of its inherent value and not to simply add a line to the resumé or curriculum vitae.
 - ◆ The Association offers scholarships and mentoring opportunities.
- The Association’s commitment to animal welfare is important.
- A commitment to sustainability is beneficial, both in terms of the environment generally and the veterinary practice specifically.
- The following resources, offered by the Association, were highly regarded.
 - ◆ The *Have You Herd* newsletter
 - ◆ The monthly newsletter
 - ◆ The journal *The Bovine Practitioner*
 - ◆ The *Have You Herd* podcast
 - ◆ The webinars and continuing education opportunities
 - ◆ The conferences, conference proceedings, webinars
 - ◆ The classified advertising for jobs, equipment and practices, once again, are highly regarded and very much appreciated.
- Responsiveness and approachability of Association’s leadership was very positively described.
- In short, the Association does not seem to have noticeable retention issue with young practitioners. Non-renewal of membership, for all intents and purposes, is unrelated to the offerings of the Association.

Takeaways: Changes/improvements

Although there was much positive regard for the Association and what it offers, the respondents were also asked about areas for improvement. We asked young practitioners what could be changed or implemented to improve the Association.

- The listserv was seen as important, but perhaps out of step with younger practitioners. There was a decided preference for the Facebook approach taken by The Vet Truck – Bovine Vet-to-Vet Forum.
- The Association needs to bridge the gap between the consumer and the profession. The Association needs to proactively engage society as a whole.
- Somewhat related the listserv, digital acumen was described as in need of improvement.
- More wet labs were desired at the conferences, not just lectures, in addition to more hands-on opportunities.

- More multimedia continuing education and conference presentations.
- Conduct regional conferences in addition to the national conference.
- Gender representation was talked about by both female and male respondents. Although it was acknowledged that the Association is sensitive to gender issues, progress was seen as very slow.
- The apparent lack of ethnic diversity was considered a systemic issue within the profession.
- There was a desire for more practical information/learning opportunities regarding business and practice management.
- Work/life balance was also a common topic.
- Stress, burnout and compassion fatigue surfaced organically.

Key insights

An insight can be defined as knowledge that is retroactively self-evident. The following insights were gleaned from the totality of interviews:

- Veterinarians need to be recognized as a whole person who has a life outside of the practice of bovine medicine. More specifically, young practitioners are just beginning to chart their course in life. In some ways, they are at the starting point of self-discovery. The camaraderie, mentorship and networking offered by the Association, particularly at the conferences, should be consciously and thoughtfully fostered.
- As young professionals, they are faced with some of life’s most stressful events, including:
 - ◆ Relocation.
 - ◆ Entering their first practice.
 - ◆ Working long hours without the close support of their social network.
 - ◆ A new boss, perhaps an unaccepting clientele.
 - ◆ A change in relationship status such as engagement, marriage or divorce.

Recommendations

- Onboarding young practitioners – guidelines or checklists regarding hiring and orienting new employees for both the hiring practice and the newly hired veterinarian.
- Ownership transfer. A number of young practitioners are looking for an opportunity to take over a practice. Most will be looking for a gradual and planful transition. This is not always the case. The Association is in a position to create or develop guidelines or a checklist of best practices to assist in the process, not only for the young practitioners, but for the owner exiting the practice.
- The Association should consider developing or vetting practice management consultants to assist with the succession planning for onboarding and transfer of ownership of practices.
- Post-graduate communication with young practitioners. Not just congratulation on completing veterinary school and entering the profession, but communications strategically and developmentally staged over the first years of practice.
- Vision/mission statement for the association. Young practitioners can easily articulate what the association does and how it does it. However, they cannot similarly articulate what the

associations stands for. Interestingly the listserv has a mission statement, but not the Association.

- Branding. A brand may be described as the totality of what the organization represents in the mind of the audience. A brand is intangible. Some argue the brand is the most valuable asset of a company or organization. It has equity. A brand should be purposely developed. It has an architecture. The brand should be realistic and credible, while at the same time be aspirational. The brand is what comes to the mind of the audience when the name of the organization is mentioned.

Research details

Objectives

Stated objectives:

1. Ascertain overall the perceptions of the association of newly minted bovine practitioners.
2. Ascertain/identify specific reason(s) recent graduates have for not renewing their membership.
3. Explore reasons to belong to the Association from the perspective of the recent graduate.
4. Determine and prioritize features and benefits that are most compelling and necessary to retain a membership.
5. Test the hypothesis that the reason younger members are not renewing their membership is because they are leaving cattle practice.

Key areas for exploration:

1. Overall perceptions of the Association
2. Reason for joining – key requirements for more members
3. Expectations/have expectations been met
4. Value of membership to their practice
5. Engagement with the organization
6. Would recommend the Association to others

Methodology

In-depth Interviews – average length of 45 minutes. All but one interview was a video call.

Participants

Recruitment and selection

Solicitation emails were sent to a random selection of members and lapsed members of the Association who had graduated from veterinary school between 2016 and 2021. Prior to the distribution of the email, an announcement regarding the research was mentioned in the newsletter so that members would know that the project was sponsored by the Association. If the recipient of the email was interested in participating, a screening questionnaire was then sent. Incentive for participation was \$100, either for the respondent or a charity of their choice. Upon completion of the screening questionnaire, the interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the respondent.

A total of 13 bovine veterinarians were interviewed, 10 women and 3 men.

All had graduated between 2016 and 2021 and had been in practice for less than 5 years.

Employment

- 4 Private Practice Owner
- 6 Private Practice Associate
- 7 Group Practice with more than 2 Veterinarians
- 2 Staff Veterinarian

Type of practice

- Ten were almost exclusively devoted to bovine medicine
 - ◆ Five were mostly dairy
 - ◆ Six were dairy, cow/calf
 - ◆ Two included feedlot, stocker, cow calf
 - ◆ Six included dairy, cow-calf pet & backyard, equine, small ruminant
- Three spent about half of their time with cattle, and were in mixed animal practice that included equine, small ruminants, cervids and some companion animals. They considered themselves cattle vets.

Geography

Subjects were well dispersed geographically with veterinarians from eastern states including New York and New Hampshire; the Midwest including Nebraska, Illinois and Wisconsin; and the west with California and Washington.

Self-description

These young practitioners described themselves using terms such as:

- Driven
- Highly motivated to do the right thing
- Focused
- Stubborn
- Upbeat
- Optimistic
- Energetic
- Independent
- Passionate

Further, from the extended conversation, they could all be described as social. They enjoyed their interactions with their clientele as well as interactions with the colleagues. The conferences, both the Annual Conference and the Recent Graduate Conference were highly regarded. Many respondents had attended the Annual Conference as students. Despite the pandemic, most had participated in the Recent Graduate Conference. Both events were described as opportunities to connect with peers, camaraderie, social networking, developing new relationships, and being part of the larger community of cattle veterinarians. The social aspect of these gatherings should not be underestimated.

Detailed findings

Important issues facing bovine medicine

Some common themes emerged when asked about issues facing the bovine medicine industry. Most mentioned were labor issues, consolidation of farms, aging clientele, work ethic of new graduates, input costs, narrow margins, inflation and food safety and traceability. Even the invasion of Ukraine was mentioned along with uncertainty of world markets.

Work force

The veterinarian work force was a topic given quite a bit of attention. Part of the conversation involved the perception of a declining number of veterinarians who seem to be entering bovine practice.

- New grads and new hires decline every year.
- There aren't enough new veterinarians to replace the ones retiring and leaving bovine medicine.
- There is also an overall shortage of farm labor.
- We're seeing more and more people in the industry who didn't come from a cattle industry background.

Finally, there was the perception that some of the newer veterinarians who had considered cattle practice didn't want to work weekends, be on call, nor live in the areas of the country where the cattle are.

Public perception

A few mentioned that the industry seemed unwilling to adapt to standards put forth by the public. Referencing the use of antibiotics as a treatment-only and not as a preventive. Public perception the production animal process was mentioned along with the naivete of the consumer who has never stepped on a farm. Respondents were of the opinion that the Association should take more of leadership role in communicating directly to the general public.

Food safety

Food safety and the tracking of animals throughout the production cycle was seen as an increasingly important issue for consumers.

Veterinary schools

Is the relationship between veterinary schools and the Association such that the needs of the practicing profession reflected in the curriculum of the veterinary schools? As recent graduates, respondents voiced some concern about the alignment of current veterinary school programs of study and the current and future of the practice of bovine medicine. Could the Association be more involved with influencing curriculum?

Manufacturer influence

The influence of pharmaceutical and nutrition companies surfaced in various places in the interviews. In one example, a young consulting practitioner had recommended treatment protocols for a herd as part of their fee-for-service, only to have a pharmaceutical field veterinarian write a different script. Since the industry veterinarian did not charge a fee, it was an uncomfortable situation and seemingly compromised the value of the practitioner.

There were a number of references to an uneasy alliance between the Association and the manufacturers. The respondents understand the connection and necessity of industry involvement, but they feel it is a question of and the appearance of balance.

Evolution of bovine medicine

In the eyes of these respondents, the practice of bovine medicine is rapidly changing. They remarked that some of their older colleagues and convention attendees would talk about how many preg checks they did last year or other hands-on

services. The consensus of these respondents was that today and going forward, services provided by veterinarians will be less palpating, less physical contact with the cattle, and more data-driven herd management, evolving into more of an education and business partnership role. More and more of the physical services that were once performed by the veterinarian will be performed by the farm workers. The evolving role of the veterinarian will be more focused on consulting with the farmer/producer in such a manner as to optimize herd health while maximizing the return on investment.

Isolation and stress

The feelings isolation and stress among young practitioners will be covered in more detail in the Stress and Burnout section of this report, but stress and isolation first surfaced, organically, when talking about issues facing bovine medicine. New practitioners normally relocate to accept their first job. At this stage of their life, they are often dealing with other and significant stressful life events. Some examples include starting a new job, an engagement or planning a wedding, and moving to a new location with no social life or friends (often to smaller communities). Young practitioners have just left a university environment which included a campus community as well as close friendships with their fellow veterinary students. Reactions to these life changes are highly individualized. It's not necessarily the stressor that is problematic, but how the individual deals with the stressor. In some situations, recognizing the situation as a stressor is the most important step.

Association memberships

Nearly all respondents were members of the American Veterinary Medical Association, primarily for the insurance products provided by the organization and to a lesser degree the retirement plan. Memberships in other associations included Academy of Veterinary Consultants, American Embryo Transfer Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners, and state level veterinary associations. Without exception, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners was described as their most important and valuable membership.

All respondents joined the Association while in veterinary school. For nearly all respondents, their employer or practice paid for their membership. It's interesting to note that none were certain what the membership dues were. Most thought the annual dues were between \$200 and \$300 but were not certain. With all the life changes they were experiencing, the cost of membership to the Association was not something they thought about. All but one continued with an active membership. For the one respondent, the decision not to renew was based solely on the practice's policy to pay for only 2 memberships per veterinarian. The other veterinarians in the practice were members of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, so she joined another related association. She indicated that she felt she still had some access to the Association through the other veterinarians in the practice.

Another member was considering alternating the American Association of Bovine Practitioners, membership with the American Association of Equine Practitioners, since the practice had a number of equine clients. They were not thinking about abandoning the American Association of Bovine Practitioners altogether, but attempting to service both species.

Satisfaction with the Association

Respondents were asked about their opinions about the Association in a number of ways. One well-established and commonly used approach to ascertain overall satisfaction is to ask if the respondent would recommend membership to others. Since all the respondents had graduated from veterinary school within the last 5 years, they were asked if they would recommend joining the Association to a student in veterinary school with an interest in livestock. All the responses were overwhelmingly positive. The term “absolutely” was used a number of times. They were asked for a sales pitch for the Association. The respondents listed a number of very practical reasons for joining, ranging from networking with the profession, mentorship, externship and employment opportunities, potential scholarships, information in the form of access to journals, the podcast, the listserv, access to recordings of past conferences, webinars, the newsletter, classified ads, etc. The annual conference was very highly regarded. It is interesting to note that no one mentioned that a student should become a member because you “should” be a member, or it looks good on the resumé or curriculum vitae. All the reasons given to join were pragmatic and are evidence of the value proposition of the Association as seen by young practitioners.

Perceptions of American Association of Bovine Practitioners

The overall perceptions of the Association were relatively consistent among those interviewed. The organization is seen as:

- The voice of bovine practitioners.
- Representative of the profession.
- The keeper and disseminator of all sorts of information, from continuing education materials to scientific findings.
- A watch dog of sorts for issues from legislation to social and economic trends that may affect the bovine industry as a whole.
- A community with the wisdom of age coupled with the energy, independence, optimism and eagerness of youth.
- A source of an identity.
- Representative of a growingly diverse group of practitioners that recognizes the diverse nature of its members and is working to evolve with the times.

All respondents were asked if the Association was meeting their needs as bovine practitioners using a scale from 1 to 10. A rating of 10 meant it was totally meeting their needs and a rating of 1 was just the opposite. The numerical rating was used as point of reference and not intended to have quantitative implications. It was used as a starting point to discuss the benefits/pluses and areas for improvement or change for the organization. With that as context, nearly all the ratings given were around 8.

Table 1:

Benefits/pluses	Areas for improvement
Journal and access to information	Financial assistance/loan interest rates
Mentoring	Want to learn from a veterinarian, not an academic
Great place to learn about best medicine	Perhaps too much industry involvement with the annual conference
Promotes sustainability	Diversity of the profession
Listserves	Listserves
Website	Overwhelming with amount of info available
Newsletter	Gender representation
<i>Have You Herd?</i> Podcast	Digital acumen could be improved
Networking	More frequent webinars
Concern for public image	AABP should address the sale of antibiotics through feedstores
Innovative with an old school mind set	More on public perception of the industry
Everyone wants us to be successful/supportive	Help the veterinary schools with enhancing the education of bovine practitioners
Keeps up with legislation	
Info on managing your business	
Camaraderie	
Classified ads	
Inclusive	

Gender issues

Of the 760 young practitioners in the sample file, which was used to recruit respondents, 68% were women and 32% were men (there were a few that had not specified gender or had a gender-neutral name). There is the perception that women are not sufficiently represented in leadership positions within the Association. It should be noted that this surfaced, unprompted from both women and men respondents. All who spoke about the issue did give the Association credit for recognizing the issue and even making strides in the right direction. They acknowledge change is occurring, just at a very slow pace.

American Association of Bovine Practitioners as a vehicle

Automobiles, trucks and vehicles are excellent reference points and great symbols. Utilizing this metaphor enables participants to utilize a different part of their brain and visualize, much like the phrase “a picture is worth a thousand words.” All respondents were asked, If the American Association of Bovine Practitioners were a vehicle, what vehicle would it be?

The descriptions were remarkably similar. The most common vehicle described was a:

- Ford F150 truck between 4 and 8 years old.
- It's been around for a while.
- Not flashy, dark blue.
- A few scratches, but well maintained.
- Not super fancy, reliable, practical, consistent, been around for a while, not tricked out.
- It doesn't have a bunch of new things that may not work, but it has all the things that work.
- Tried and true, not on the bleeding edge, but developing.
- It's not disorganized, it just has a lot of stuff and has everything that you would need, although it may take some time to find what you were looking for.
- Utilitarian.
- AABP is Dodge diesel – in for the long haul. Big organization with a lot of people with varied backgrounds trying to fit them all in. Reliable, it's always going to be there, its large, family-sized. A dually, don't want to get stuck, can carry some weight. Early 2000. Been around for a while. There is some old in it but some new stuff – trying to incorporate new technology.

All in all, respondents were of the opinion that the association is on the right track and doing all the right things. As one respondent put it, they need to be doing “pretty much what they're doing.”

The “perfect” bovine association

All respondents were giving the opportunity to build the perfect association for bovine practitioners. Further, they were asked if they could change one thing about the Association, what they would change? These were the last questions asked in the interviews, so they had ample time to think about the Association and their relationship to it. For the most part, most respondents thought the organization was doing a really good job and should continue to do what it's doing. They encouraged the Association to keep moving, continue to be responsive and adaptive. Below are suggestions that were offered.

Conference-related

- Wet labs more hands-on opportunities at the conference.
- A bit more distance between academia and practitioners; after all the Association is a practitioner's association (please note these respondents were relatively fresh out of veterinary school)
 - ◆ Oftentimes academic means impractical.
- Smaller regional conferences – in addition to the annual conference
 - ◆ Regionalize the content when possible.
 - ◆ Regional conferences would make it easier for me to attend.
 - ◆ Have one regional and one national conference per year.
 - ◆ Localized road show, smaller more intimate but tethered to the “mothership” – practicing dairy medicine in New York in dairy is different than dairy medicine in California.

Academic and industry relations

- Attempt to influence the academics more, both on research and veterinary school education.
- A little close to pharma – lanyards branded by a manufacturer.
- ...has to be by and for and powered by the members.
- Would pay more dues if it would make us independent; money sours relationships

Diversity

- Could do a better job on gender representation.
- Little ethnic diversity in the profession.
- ...need to figure out why we're not diverse.

Listserve

- Only about 10 to 20% of it is good, the rest is fluff.
- Needs to be searchable.
- Stop the listserve/revamp it.
- It got political.
- Generational differences on using non-approved/off-label approaches to treatment – dislike of anecdotal evidence.
- Overwhelmingly the young practitioners prefer the Vet Truck Bovine Vet-to-Vet Forum on Facebook to the s-serve
 - ◆ You access the Vet Truck Bovine Vet-to-Vet Forum when you want to, the listserve just keeps coming at you.

Consumer perception

- AABP needs to reach out to consumers – bridge the gap.
 - ◆ Work with other organizations on the issue.
 - ◆ Provide a service to connect what veterinarians do for the world.
 - ◆ Be nimble and evolve with the times.

Retention of membership

Perhaps the most fundamental motivation to conduct this research was to ascertain if there was a non-renewal issue with young practitioners and, if so, could the issues be identified and addressed. One of those interviewed had allowed their membership to lapse. Another respondent was thinking about non-renewing. In both cases, their decision had nothing to do with shortcomings or dissatisfaction with the Association. Both respondents spoke very highly of the organization with praise regarding the offerings (e.g., the website, journal, podcast, continuing education, the conferences, etc.). Their decision

was predicated on the nature of their practice. In one case, the young practitioner was part of group practice in which all the veterinarians were members, so there was some continued access to the Association. This practitioner was absorbing much of the companion animal duties of the clinic and the practice would only pay for 2 memberships, so they were continuing with their AVMA membership and perhaps joining the American Association of Small Ruminant Practitioners or the American Association of Equine Practitioners. At the time of the interview, they had not made a decision.

It was a similar situation with the young practitioner who was thinking about not renewing. They were considering alternating their membership with the American Association of Equine Practitioners so they could keep up the trends in both areas. This young practitioner was taking on more of the practice's equine clients. Again, the decision was predicated on the practice and species. In both cases, neither veterinarian was certain about the amount of the Association dues.

All of those interviewed were asked if they were aware of or personally knew veterinarians, particularly young practitioners, who had lapsed as Association members. In the relatively small number of cases that respondents were aware of, there were 2 primary reasons for departure. For the young practitioners who were no longer members, it was because they left bovine practice. In all of those instances, they entered into small animal practice for a wide variety of reasons, including family situations (spouse's job), higher salary and shorter hours, and location of practice. In one case, the young practitioner accepted a government position. Other reasons cited were all life stage related. Older veterinarians were retiring or on a "glide path" to retiring. There was no indication of dissatisfaction with the Association to warrant non-renewing a membership. Nor was the Association lacking offerings necessary for young practitioners.

This is not to say there is no room for improvement from the perspective of the young practitioner. There were a number of suggestions for improvement, and most of the suggestions represent fundamental issues that must be addressed.

Mission and brand

The respondents described a myriad of reasons to be a member of the Association and what the organization does, but they could not explain what it is for. This may sound like a subtle distinction, but relates to the intended and expressed mission of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners. To all interviewed, the Association is "the source" for the best continuing education, for some it meant camaraderie, others valued it for the classified ads for jobs, and for a few, the association was a way to connect with mentors. As the interviews progressed, it was clear that these members were unclear of the Association's mission.

The Association's website does not appear to contain an overarching mission statement for the organization. Arguably, the mission statement of an organization is part of the foundation of its brand. A brand is more than a logo or trademark, it's the totality of what the organization represents in the target audience's mind. The brand for the Association is essentially the sum total of the rational and emotional imprints left by every interaction the veterinarians, the industry and others have with the Association. When bovine veterinarians hear the words American Association of Bovine Practitioners or think of the Association, what comes to mind? What does it symbolize? In marketing the brand should tell the audience how to think, feel and behave

relative to the products and services put forth. Jeremy Bullmore said something to the effect that, "...consumers build the image of a brand as birds build nests. From scraps of straw they chance upon." The nest is built of those things birds find in the environment. It is incumbent on the organization to put those things in the audience's environment with which it wants to be identified. Essentially, what does the Association stand for in the eyes of the member, and by extension, other audiences with which it chooses to engage?

Currently, the association's brand means a good many things to members, but it's thought of in terms of what it does for them as a member. There doesn't appear to be any forward-looking aspiration, inspirational or motivational attributes when describing the Association. What does the Association mean to veterinarians and the industry? The Association needs to control its brand and a well-crafted mission statement is a perfect starting point.

One of the recommendations put forth by the respondents in this research was to engage with the end consumer and perhaps society at large. If the Association chooses to thoughtfully engage with audiences beyond veterinarians, the brand becomes even more important.

Stress and burnout

Stress

The term stress as is used in today's vernacular can be traced to Hans Selye (1946), an endocrinologist, who defined it as non-specific response of the body to any demand or change. For the purposes of this discourse stress is defined as feelings of social, mental, physical and/or emotional pressure. Stress is a normal part of everyday life. To quote Selye (1973) again, "Complete freedom from stress is death. Contrary to public opinion, we must not and indeed cannot – avoid stress..."

There are any number of stressors in modern life. Stressful life events may be looked as if they are on a continuum from a mild stressful event like being a few minutes late for an appointment to a major stressful event like the death of a loved one. Stress can be short-term and acute to long-term and chronic. Not only is the stressor important, but perhaps equally important is recognizing what the stressor is and how to deal with the stress.

Some of the most common causes stress among young practitioners included but are not limited to:

- Student to practitioner transition
- Wedding and planning a wedding
- Divorce
- Relocation
- Adjusting to isolation of small community
- Adjusting to the Covid-19 pandemic
- Student debt
- Birth of a child
- Struggles/challenges of taking over a practice
- Acceptance of the new veterinarian by clientele
- Separation from veterinary school friends
- Separation from close family members

Holmes and Raye stress scale

In order to offer a frame of reference for the subject of stress, The Social Readjustment Stress Scale is a good starting point. The Social Readjustment Stress Scale case is being used as an

example and a way to convey the many stressful life events people experience, not necessarily as an endorsement. In one of the early efforts to identify and weight stressful events, Holmes and Raye (1967) developed a weighted list of 43 common life events and studied the link between stress and illness. The Holmes and Raye scale weighted the life event the death of a spouse as the most stressful and assigned a weight of 100; the least stressful on their scale was a minor violation with the law with a weight of 11. The scale was intended as more or less a self-administered instrument. These life events can be stressful and devastating to be sure, but it's not necessarily the event in and of itself, but how one deals with event.

Social readjustment stress scale

1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation	65
4. Jail term	63
5. Death of close family member	63
6. Personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Fired from work	47
9. Marital reconciliation	45
10. Retirement	45
11. Change in health of family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sex difficulties	39
14. Gain of new family member	39
15. Business readjustment	39
16. Change in financial state	38
17. Death of a close friend	37
18. Change to a different line of work	36
19. Change in number arguments with spouse	35
20. A large mortgage or loan	31
21. Foreclosure or mortgage or loan	30
22. Change in responsibilities at work	29
23. Son or daughter leaving home	29
24. Trouble with in-laws	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse begins or stops work	26
27. Begin or end school/college	26
28. Change in living conditions	25
29. Revision in personal habits	24
30. Trouble with boss	23
31. Change in work hours or conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
33. Change in school/college	20
34. Change in recreation	19
35. Change in church activities	19
36. Change in social activities	18
37. A moderate loan or mortgage	17
38. A change in sleep habits	16
39. Change in number of family get-togethers	15
40. Change in eating habits	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Christmas	13
43. Minor violations with the law	11

Score 11 – 150 low-to-moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future

Score 150 – 299 moderate-to-high chance of becoming ill in the near future

Score 300 – 600 high-to-very high risk of becoming ill in the near future

By virtue of the early stage of their careers, young practitioners are subject to some rather stressful life events. Of the 43 life events put forth by Holmes and Raye, young practitioners are likely to experience 16 of them. Nearly all of these surfaced during the interviews.

2. Divorce	73
3. Marital separation	65
7. Marriage	50
12. Pregnancy	40
14. Gain of a new family member	39
15. Business readjustment	39
16. Change in financial state	38
20. A large mortgage or loan	31
22. Change in responsibilities at work	29
27. Begin or end school/college	26
28. Change in living conditions	25
30. Trouble with boss	23
31. Changes in work hours or conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
36. Change in social activities	18
38. Change in sleep habits	16

Burnout

As with the aforementioned section on stress, burnout was a topic that emerged during the interviews. It seems clear for a portion of young practitioners that burnout and stress are of noticeable importance. More than one made reference to the suicide rate among veterinarians. All references to stress, burnout and even suicide surfaced organically without prompting during the interviews.

Burnout as with stress was mentioned during the interviews. Burnout is another one of those terms that is commonly used but not often operationally defined. For the purposes of this discussion, the definition of burnout is how frequently and intensely individuals experience feelings of emotional exhaustion, loss of personal accomplishment, and depersonalization (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). This definition seems to fit with what the respondents were talking about. Please keep in mind that most of the comments were in line with the fear of being stressed-out and burning out. It seems obvious it is concern for them. On the positive side of the issue, they are aware of the issues. It's often said that the first step in addressing and solving a problem is recognizing the problem is there.

One of the reasons to approach the first phase of the research in somewhat of an exploratory manner was perhaps happened upon unanticipated findings such as stress and burnout. Since the issues of stress and burnout were not part of the objectives nor intentionally queried for, but surfaced as part of the interviews, it is not known how pervasive or problematic they are.

Whole person

Similar to stress and burnout, the phrase I'm a whole person was mentioned directly and the concept that I'm more the just a veterinarian was discussed. Again, the concept and discussion were unprompted. There is an old term in psychology that traces its roots to the early 1900s, gestalt. A basic definition of gestalt is an organized whole is perceived as more than the sum of its collective parts. Or more simply put, the whole is more than the sum of its parts. More than one of the respondents directly stated or through implication that they were more than "just a cattle vet". They were a "whole person". Further, the Association would be prudent to recognize that "I have a life" outside of bovine medicine is something that should be addressed. This issue is partially, and arguably incompletely, addressed with work/life balance rhetoric. It's somewhat akin to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943, 1954, 1962) where the veterinarian, by virtue of gaining employment, has satisfied the basic need for shelter and security, but they recognize they need so much more than the basic needs.

Conclusions

The results of this research indicate that young practitioners are not non-renewing their memberships due to shortcomings of the Association. Rather non-renewals are likely due to leaving the practice of bovine medicine. Further, perhaps one of the main reasons that young practitioners are leaving bovine medicine is likely due to financial and work/life balance issues.

The American Association of Bovine Practitioners has an excellent reputation among young practitioners. There is high perceived value on the exchange of their dues for the value they receive from the organization. For all intents and purposes, the expectations that young practitioners have for the Association are being met.

Without exception, those interviewed would highly recommend membership in the Association for veterinary students with an interest in large animal medicine.

Further, these young practitioners found the practice of bovine medicine important, gratifying and personally, professionally and financially rewarding.

Finally, the American Association of Bovine Practitioners is "the" organization for cattle veterinarians. It's a community that possesses deep knowledge and abundant wisdom. It is perceived as community that wants its members to succeed. It fosters camaraderie and open transfer of information.

With all the positives of the organization, there are a number of areas of improvement, which have been discussed throughout the report. Some of the areas of improvement include: the listserve, gender representation, sufficient veterinary students entering bovine medicine, veterinary education alignment with practice, public perception, the relationship between manufacturers and the Association, etc.

Ideas for consideration

- Creation of vision and mission statements
- Task force/working group for
 - ◆ Digital acumen
 - Listserve
 - YouTube Channel – to promote bovine medicine and dissemination of credible information

- TED Talk regarding the industry
- ◆ Mission/vision statement
- ◆ Brand architecture
- ◆ Stress and burnout
- ◆ Ownership transition
 - Succession planning
 - Does the AABP have a list of approved consultants
- ◆ On-boarding new veterinarians from both the new employee and owner perspective
- ◆ Involve the younger practitioners as much as possible in these work groups
- Media training for the "voice of bovine medicine" Speakers bureau – for veterinary schools, career fairs, etc.
- Explore/examine connections with organizations like the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, American Dairy Association, state level entities like the California Department of Food and Ag, etc.
- Position paper – the future of bovine medicine

Next steps

Phase II was intended to quantify/size the issues uncovered in the exploratory In-depth Interviews with young practitioners. The thinking at that time was we could narrow the focus of the inquiry to specific issues and determine how pervasive the issues may be.

Given the nature of the findings presented here, it is recommended that original objectives be modified and include all members. The membership survey would be stratified by length of time as a bovine practitioner, gender and if possible, by geography.

Phase II Objectives

- 1) Ascertain in order of importance, key initiatives of the Association
- 2) Determine interest and support for new areas of focus and initiatives
- 3) Ascertain overall satisfaction with the Association and areas of focus

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