

NOAH[®] - AVMA Network of Animal Health

James Brewer

National Network Manager
Center for Information Management
American Veterinary Medical Association
Schaumburg Illinois

NOAH

NOAH is an acronym for Network of Animal Health. NOAH is a computer-based online service developed by the American Veterinary Medical Association for its members, and other professional involved in veterinary medicine and animal health.

Informatics

A definition of Informatics is provided by Edward Shortliffe:

"The rapidly developing scientific field dealing with the storage, retrieval and optimal use of biomedical information, data, and knowledge for problem solving and decision making."

The AVMA Committee on Veterinary Medical Informatics (AVMA CVMI) was formed in 1990 to study issues in Informatics relevant to the veterinary profession, and to make project recommendations to the AVMA Executive Board for implementation by AVMA staff.

The AVMA CVMI has three areas of involvement

Standardized Nomenclature. The AVMA CVMI has oversight of the Veterinary medical aspects of SNOMED III, a nomenclature system developed by the AVMA and the College of American Pathologists. A veterinary secretariat for SNOMED operates through the Informatics Laboratory at the Virginia/Maryland Regional CVM.

Database. Large-scale veterinary databases, such as the Veterinary Medical Database (VMDB), are an area of growing importance to the AVMA CVMI. VMDB, operating at Purdue University, is represented with a seat on the AVMA CVMI.

Networks. NOAH was conceived, designed, developed and launched with oversight from the AVMA CVMI. Operational oversight for NOAH is currently provided by the AVMA CVMI.

The AVMA CVMI also has oversight to the development and operation of the growing AVMA presence on the World Wide Web (WWW). AVMA has its own do-

main (avma.org) on the Internet to support its WWW presence. The AVMA home page can be accessed through www.avma.org.

Development of NOAH

The AVMA CVMI considered a computer based network to be of vital importance as a tool to integrate nomenclature and databases, and provide efficient, low-cost access them for AVMA members and other professionals.

The original concept of the network reflected the structure of organized veterinary medicine, and lead to a design that would facilitate contributions from associations, universities, government, industry, and veterinarians in private practice.

A request for proposal (RFP) was written in late 1991 and was sent to 25 online service providers in early 1992. The (RFP) contained the design for the network, and specified the tools that would be necessary to bring the maximum number of users online at the least cost. By mid-1992, 12 providers delivered proposals. After careful evaluation, CompuServe, Inc., was selected as the vendor.

A network manager was hired in October, 1993. Contract negotiations were completed with CompuServe in December, 1993. Four months later, in April, 1994, NOAH was launched.

Structure

NOAH can be separated into three main areas: forums, databases, and news and information services.

Forums

Forums are interactive areas, where users can participate directly by both gathering and providing information. NOAH forums have three elements: message areas, file libraries and online conference rooms. Message areas resemble bulletin boards, where messages can be posted, read and searched for. File libraries resemble specialized data bases, where text and graph-

Presented at the Minnesota Dairy Health Conference, May 22-23, 1996; Dr. Charles Casey, coordinator.

ics files can be stored and retrieved. Conference rooms support real-time group discussion and other features such as one-on-one discussions, quizzes and voting.

There are five forums on NOAH: *Clinical Medicine and Speciality Medicine* support discussion of medical matters; *Professional Issues* supports discussion of economic, social and legal significance to veterinary medicine; *Organizations* provides a base for veterinary associations to communicate with their members; and *Industry* supports pharmaceutical, nutrition and other firms in the veterinary marketplace.

Databases

NOAH has five searchable databases. Each database supports full-text searches of the entire database. The five databases are:

Two literature abstract databases. The Institute for Scientific Information, based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, has formed a partnership with the AVMA and NOAH to provide abstracted veterinary articles for the last five years. This data base, available on a subscription basis for NOAH members, contains abstracts from over 85 journals in veterinary medicine, agriculture and the biomedical sciences. Complete articles are available to subscribers from ISI at a discounted rate.

NOAH also supports a free literature abstract database. Currently, that database contains abstracted articles from JAVMS, AJVR and the Canadian Veterinary Journal.

AVMA Online Membership Directory lists over 62,000 veterinarians. Searches can be performed on name, location, veterinary college and year of graduation, and professional speciality.

Veterinary Drug Handbook, 2nd Edition by Donald Plumb, is a searchable database of the full text of the handbook in its 2nd edition. It is available on NOAH as a free database thanks to a grant from Pfizer Animal Health.

Master Calendar of Events is a collection of over 300 veterinary meetings and continuing education opportunities in North America and around the world. The Calendar is continuously updated to provide the latest information on these events.

News & Information

Currently information from the world of veterinary medicine and animal health is uploaded to NOAH on a daily basis, through a feature called *Veterinary Medicine in the News*. Another feature, *What's New on NOAH*, provides NOAH members with an easy reference to upcoming events, including online seminars. Online help is also provided to support the new NOAH member.

NOAH has grown at a steady rate since its launch. At the end of April, 1996, NOAH had over 2,400 paying members, and more than 200 funded accounts. Each college of veterinary medicine and accredited program in veterinary technology enjoy NOAH accounts funded by an educational grant from Hill's Pet nutrition, Inc.

Over 50,000 messages, 1,000 library files and 60 moderated online seminars have been logged on NOAH since launch.

NOAH has formed partnerships with major organizations in veterinary medicine, including ACVIM, ABVP, ACT, AAHA and many others state and national veterinary organizations. These partnerships include conducting online seminars, providing volunteers to participate on NOAH, and other content-building activities.

NOAH recently launched its first online continuing education module. Dr. Rebecca Kirby, DACVIM, DACVECC, conducted a four-week course on emergency medicine and critical care. 50 veterinarians participated, and earned 6 AVMA-approved CE credits. Other CE modules are planned for launch in the 3rd quarter, 1996.

Getting Started on NOAH

NOAH presently operates on CompuServe, a leading provider of online services and Internet access. To get onto NOAH, you need to have a CompuServe account.

NOAH Starter Kits are available through the AVMA. Each NOAH Starter Kit includes software for Windows, Macintosh or DOS computers, and a copy of The Official NOAH Guidebook, a 90-page primer on navigating NOAH. The software provides for access to CompuServe, and is specially configured to grant access to the private NOAH area on CompuServe.

Each new NOAH user receives a free 30-day trial to evaluate NOAH, and also receives 20 complementary hours on other CompuServe services. The time spent in NOAH does not accrue toward the free CompuServe hours.

At the end of the evaluation period, NOAH costs \$17.00 per month for unlimited time in NOAH. CompuServe accounts costs \$9.95 per month. Each month, NOAH subscribers get 5 free hours to use on CompuServe any way they choose, including Internet services. As with the trial period, the time spent in NOAH does not accrue toward the free CompuServe hours.

If you would like to obtain a NOAH Starter Kit, or if you have any questions about NOAH, please call the AVMA Center for Information Management at 800-248-2862, extension 297. Or, send us electronic mail at 72662.3434 @compuserve.com.