Help Wanted: Must Love Animals, Teaching, Saving the World

by (ARA)

Itâ€™s hard to believe that a few retiring professors could have much of an impact on our lives. But a shortage of veterinary pathology professors may soon have a lasting impact on global health. â€œWithin the next five to eight years, every senior veterinary pathologist faculty member at Ohio State University will retire,â€• said Paul Stromberg, president, American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP) and professor in the Department of Veterinary Biosciences at Ohio State. â€œItâ€™s not unique to Ohio State University -- itâ€™s like that all across the country. Thereâ€™s just not enough people coming up in the ranks to replace them.â€• This shortage will have a huge impact on health and medicine, where veterinary pathologists perform critical work behind-the-scenes. Pharmaceutical companies need veterinary pathologists to help test new drugs for safety and get approval from the FDA. And fewer veterinary pathologists may ultimately mean fewer life-saving drugs and treatments reaching consumers and their pets each year. Veterinary pathologists are also on the frontlines every time a new disease or epidemic emerges. Two veterinary pathologists in New York were the first to detect the West Nile virus in the United States. This quick detection is crucial to containing other outbreaks like the Ebola virus or avian flu and is a specialty unmatched by any other profession. Zoos and pet owners will also be affected. Few zoos have the financial resources to employ a full-time veterinary pathologist. So when zoo animals die of unknown causes, university pathologists perform autopsies to help determine the cause of death. And when a cherished pet dies unexpectedly, the veterinary pathologist at a local university can sometimes provide answers that help owners through the grieving process. â€œItâ€™s not that the last guy will turn out the lights, go home and that will be the end of the profession,â€• Stromberg said. â€œThe real problem is that the shortage of academic pathologists will slow down progress. Progress in detecting emerging diseases. Identifying new drugs and developing new approaches to disease detection, treatment and management. And, perhaps, protecting the world from Ebola virus or the next emerging disease as well as bioterrorism.â€• Most importantly, it is university-based veterinary pathologists who train the next generation. Unless these senior faculty are replaced by young enthusiastic faculty who will continue the training, our society will suffer a decline in these important health care workers whose knowledge, skill and dedication are so important, yet rarely appreciated. Universities are working to correct the problem. Although some universities are still looking to hire research-oriented pathologists, some faculty positions are now 75 percent teaching and diagnostics, and only 25 percent research. Universities hope that this will help attract pathologists who have a passion for teaching and interacting with students and continue the strong tradition of education and service in order to keep the supply coming in quantities sufficient to fill the 300 some positions that are now open. Veterinary pathologists train an additional three to six years after veterinary school. They then must pass a certification exam with the ACVP to become members of the elite organization. There are currently 45 veterinary pathology university programs in the United States. â€œWeâ€™re working hard to help people understand that a career in veterinary pathology academics can be wonderfully rewarding,â€• Stromberg said. â€œThis new structure is ready-made for anyone with a fundamental desire to teach.â€• To learn more, visit www.acvp.org.