

Training Today for the Veterinarian of Tomorrow

The scope and variety of veterinary medical practice today, along with the dynamic of change in the science of veterinary medicine, require a demanding and broad-based educational experience to prepare for future challenges.

Currently, most veterinarians are in a general practice that involves farm animals or companion animals (horses, dogs, cats, and so forth). Recent and rapid advances in knowledge, accompanied by increases in available technology, have generated a much greater degree of professional specialization. Presently, a wide variety of species specialists are practicing veterinary medicine, ranging from the traditional (equine, farm, and small animals) to the more exotic (zoo animals and wildlife) to the intensively managed poultry and aquaculture programs. The University's unique Caribbean location offers an ideal environment for the study of aquatic medicine.

There is also a well-established range of more than 20 clinical specialties, such as orthopedics, cardiology, and ophthalmology. In addition, veterinarians play an important role in wildlife conservation, the welfare of animals in zoos, and public health. Public health is a well-established and rapidly increasing part of the veterinarian's education and responsibilities. The North American Free Trade Act and globalization of economics have generally increased the demand for individuals trained in the safety of foods of animal origin. Increasing numbers of people are moving around the world with their pets. This new travel pattern provides exposure to the spread of zoonotic diseases to new environments. Veterinarians play an important role in academic institutions and an increasing role in research. They recently assumed a major role in protecting the public from bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, or "mad cow" disease) in the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States and the worldwide spread of avian influenza and H1N1 influenza.

Ethical issues on the use of animals in experimentation have led to an even greater role for the veterinarian in ever-deepening research in pharmacology and other industries. A host of dramatically expanding career opportunities awaits the veterinary medical graduate.