



It is Time to Ask Some Questions

In recent years there has been a significant paradigm shift in veterinary medicine. During the COVID crisis of 2020 veterinary medicine saw a spike in business with animal owners having more time to spend with pets as well as a slew of new pet owners. Compared to twenty to twenty-five years ago, there has also been a dramatic rise in the type of care veterinarians are able to offer patients from medicine and treatments available in general practice. We have also seen a rise of specialty medicine for animals and the continued need for staff and associate veterinarians. There are new avenues to serve clients over social media and other technologies, and more career opportunities for veterinarians and veterinary staff members. Overall, there has been a huge surge in the pet industry; it has become a 35 billion dollar per year business.

Along with the numerous positive changes, we are also seeing negative consequences and it is time to take a look at how the changes in veterinary medicine have an overall impact, not only on the industry itself but the overall result. Some of the negative consequences that have erupted over the last twenty plus years include the suicide pandemic, the rise of burn out and compassion fatigue, as well as increased incidences of highly emotional responses from clients including their losing trust and becoming disrespectful. It is also important to consider the forces of outside influences on veterinary medicine and how they put the profession and animal ownership at risk.

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Veterinarians and Veterinary Team Members Play a Critical Role in Society

The veterinary industry from veterinarians to hospital staff members need to embrace their critical and important role in our society. Veterinarians and veterinary staff members have incredible influence on how the public views animal welfare, animal ownership, animal research, pet breeding, zoos and aquariums, species conservation, and farming and ranching. Essentially all sectors of animal industry rely on veterinarians, and veterinarians and veterinary staff members rely on all the sectors of animal industry as well. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the information being relayed to the public and the groups that are being supported. This article is meant to be thought provoking and to help veterinarians and veterinary staff members recognize the importance of standing united with animal ownership.

Animal Extremist Groups Impact on Veterinary Medicine

Animal extremists and other nongovernmental groups have worked diligently to further their agenda by using money and influence directed at the field of veterinary medicine, with a special emphasis on the small animal sector. These groups are aiming to end all animal ownership and are making strides using veterinary students, veterinarians, and their staff to further the process. Animal extremist groups use very subtle language to achieve their goal. Even their term of "animal rights" is proof of this insidious language and because of that, we are calling it what it is: animal extremism. When veterinarians and veterinary staff members support animal extremist campaigns and ideology, they do not realize they are being utilized to structure their own demise.

The Ideology of Animal Extremism Virtually Eliminates the Need for Veterinary Medicine

Animal health and welfare has nothing to do with the ideology of animal extremism. The idea that animals should have the same rights as humans, including the freedom from the 'slavery' of being owned is the primary ideology of animal extremism. The basic tenets virtually eliminate the need for veterinarians:

- There is no need for veterinarians if there are to be no animals in human care.
- There is no need for veterinarians if no one owns animals.
- There is no need for veterinarians if animals are to be "admired from afar".
- There is no need for veterinarians if animals are to have no contact with human beings.
- There is no need for veterinarians if animal ownership is considered slavery.
- How can animals receive medical care if there is an expectation of their "consent"?

The Veterinarian's Oath

Consider the Veterinarian's Oath:

"Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge."

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I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.”

If you understand the ideology of animal extremism, it is very clear that the veterinarian’s oath does not support it. In spite of this, there are a concerning number of veterinarians and veterinary staff members involved with animal extremist groups who support their initiatives. Many are going along supporting the animal extremist narrative by utilizing their biased statistics and buying into many of their campaigns without understanding the far-reaching consequences or the underlying agenda.

Animal Extremist Campaigns

“Adopt Don’t Shop”, “Don’t Litter”, and “Animal Guardianship” are examples of subtle anti-animal ownership campaigns launched by animal extremist groups and they have been unwittingly embraced by some in the veterinary industry. The ideology that animals should have guardians or human rights can cause veterinarians to have a judgmental view of clients that consider their pets as property instead of persons. The issues only get exponentially worse from there depending on how deeply a veterinarian or their hospital team members get drawn into the animal extremist ideology. Pushing for animal extremist legislation, fighting against animal research, and shaming clients or breeders are just a few of the negative repercussions the animal extremist philosophy has caused.

“Client Shaming” A Real Issue in the Veterinary Industry

Spend any time in veterinary groups on social media and you will see the topic of client shaming discussed. Protect The Harvest has volunteers that have spent the bulk of their careers working in the veterinary field. These volunteers have been involved in every aspect from working as Licensed Veterinary Technicians to Hospital Staff members and Management Consultants with expertise in training, client service, OSHA compliance and insurance. They know first-hand the culture and impact of “client shaming” in veterinary medicine.

Client shaming is the tactic of making clients feel guilty about their choice of a pet, where and how the pet was obtained, whether or not their pets have been spayed or neutered and their choices when it comes to providing both preventive and acute care. A negative comment will often cause a loyal client to find a new veterinarian, or worse, may make them rethink bringing their pet to “the vet” in the first place. This is well documented within the industry and numerous articles and training courses have been created about the subject.

Veterinarian’s Role in Pet Selection and Adopt Don’t Shop Client Shaming

The choice of an animal should be left strictly to the client. That being said, veterinarians and their staff play a valuable role in pet selection. They can guide owners by making recommendations so that clients find the right pet for their lifestyle and specific needs. Veterinarians and their staff know how much genetics affect behavior, intelligence, physical attributes as well as the possible health issues associated with specific breeds. These should be addressed to the client, without making the client feel guilty.



Animal extremist groups are pushing for the elimination of domestic animals and breeders by making the public feel guilty about where they choose to obtain pets. They do this by creating and spreading false information about animal breeders. They often preach that all breeders are “in it for the money”. Animal extremist groups have villainized people who make their living owning and breeding pets by claiming that they do not care about their animals. They have also villainized pet owners for keeping their pets intact and choosing to breed them on a hobby basis. Nothing could be further from the truth regarding most pet breeders and owners, whether they raise only one litter per year as a hobby or operate a commercial kennel.

Pet breeders should not be chastised or shamed into ending their breeding programs. Good breeders work to keep their animals healthy and provide a pet that fits specific lifestyles or preferences. Veterinarians are supposed to be working with breeders and pet owners to help move pet ownership in the right direction, not remove their rights or dignity like the animal extremists want.

The Impact of Adopt Don't Shop and Spay-Neuter Programs

We've all heard the slogan “Adopt, Don't Shop” as it pertains to pets. Many veterinarians push that philosophy onto their clients, not taking into account the needs of the client. The movement has been so popular that some rescues and shelters are making it a big business to adopt. When there is a shortage of adoptable pets, they import them into their areas. Some shelters have even suggested breeding shelter dogs to each other without knowing much about each dog's particular personality.

According to a 2016 study by researchers at Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine, in the United States alone, the demand for dogs has reached a staggering 8 million dogs annually. This same study also shared that approximately 5.5 million dogs entered shelters in the same period and less than 780,000 dogs were euthanized. Most euthanasias were due to the dog being extremely ill or dangerous. An additional 969,000 dogs were returned to owners, 778,000 were transferred to other rescues or shelters and 2.6 million were adopted. These numbers show a shortage of dogs. Shelters in many areas are not able to meet the demand for dogs by the public.

Meeting the Need for Adoptable Dogs

So how do shelters meet the needs of the public? According to Patti Strand, Director of the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA), the answer is “retail rescue.” “There is a lot of money in this new kind of rescue that has emerged,” Strand stated. “These groups move dogs from just about any place they can get them.” NAIA estimated an annual import of one million dogs from countries including Turkey, China, Korea and areas in the Middle East. The issue with many of the dogs imported from these countries is that they carry invalid or forged health records, and are carrying infectious canine diseases, some of which are zoonotic diseases.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, foreign dogs are subject to different health and welfare laws than those of professionally bred U.S. dogs. An example of this is rabies. The rabies virus is rampant in Mexico, India, and Taiwan, yet dogs continue to pour in from these countries with very little medical supervision. At this point in time, 6 dogs have been imported that were carrying rabies. Dogs with parasites, such as whipworm and heartworm also cross borders. In the past heartworm disease was uncommon in dry, arid western states such as California, Arizona and New Mexico. However, since Hurricane Katrina, and the importation of dogs from other tropical areas, it has become necessary to test for heartworm in those states. It



is not uncommon to find positive test results in a “rescue dog” and it is being found more often in dogs in the Western United States.

More recently in Vermont, the demand of adoptable dogs exceeded supply due to COVID-19 travel restrictions. Due to this, a group of Vermont shelters asked the governor to authorize the resumption of interstate pet transports to supply them with the hundreds of dogs sourced annually from outside the state, regardless of the threats to the public health those activities may cause. Part of the conversation among these groups even included a New England initiative aimed at encouraging the breeding of family-friendly, affordable dogs and cats at shelters. The breeding of pets by shelters would be recommended, rather than recommending that potential owners purchase their new pet from a responsible breeder who has done the research and made the commitment to breed healthy purpose-bred animals.

Why Are Veterinarians Remaining Quiet?

If the majority of veterinarians believe in animal welfare, why don't they speak out against animal extremism and the harm it does to animal owners and the pets themselves? Could it be that they simply do not know the harm animal extremist ideology is causing? Or are they simply afraid of the backlash that comes from voicing their opinion? Some of the issues that animal extremist groups are pushing go directly against animal ownership, yet many veterinarians refuse to publicly voice the truth to their clients or the community.

Animal Research is Being Vilified and Needs Support

Animal research is a vital, necessary part of veterinary medicine. Caring for animals in research requires special training. Animal research is a board-certified specialty for both veterinarians and licensed technicians. To advance in research veterinary medicine, a technician must have a B.S. in Animal Science/Veterinary Technology and they carry the title of Licensed Veterinary Technologist (LVTg). These veterinarians and their staff work to give patients the best care and attention, paying close attention to animal welfare.

Animal research is the most highly regulated specialty in veterinary medicine. Animal researchers follow very strict animal welfare protocols. Each research project has multiple oversight committees who evaluate the project, the protocols, and the welfare of the research animals, which includes environmental enrichment. <https://www.nabr.org/biomedical-research/oversight/>

It is disappointing to see veterinary staff members share misinformation crafted by animal extremist groups about animals in research. Just like humans, the veterinary field benefits immensely from animal research. The animals used in research are providing valuable information that saves human and animal lives. The medications we use to treat animals, the vaccines we use to prevent disease, and the medical procedures we perform to help animals all come from utilizing animals in research.

Though most veterinarians side with scientific facts on this topic and fully recognize the role animal research plays in animal health and welfare, they often do not like to speak out against animal extremist groups and their anti-animal research messaging.

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Anthropomorphism- Have We Gone Too Far?

Veterinary medicine is an emotional business. Most who work in the profession are doing so because they love animals and find great rewards in the satisfaction of helping animals and their owners. Now more than ever in society today pets have become a vital part of the everyday life of many Americans. Most families view their pet as another family member and less so as “the family dog” or the “family cat”, because of this, clients and their pets are treated differently at the veterinary hospital than in years past. Doing so has led to great rewards for both pet owners and the industry itself, but it is also important to ask the question – has it gone too far?

Anthropomorphism is a critical question veterinary medicine should be considering. Anthropomorphism is the projection of our human thoughts, emotions and characteristics onto animals. Veterinary staff members are encouraged to comfort and soothe the animals they are handling, as well as distraught owners, and most resort to using language they might use to comfort a young child. It makes sense that we, as humans, react to comforting sounds and language and tend to believe it will also comfort the animal. It does to an extent as animals react more positively to higher pitched voices than to low rumbling voices; they react to a calm, soothing tone as opposed to loud, sharp noises.

Anthropomorphism, Animal Ownership and Veterinary Medicine

A hundred years ago the main purpose of having a dog was to help with herding, hunting, and/or protection. Cats were used primarily to keep rodents out of food storage areas and rarely were animals like rodents or reptiles kept as pets. In today’s society, it is now seen as ‘normal’ for people to call their pet their “fur baby” and treat them as they would a human child. For many, the days when companion animals had a purpose and job are long gone. Instead, we now have a society where pets have wardrobes and go to doggie daycare centers.

Projecting one’s thoughts and emotions onto pets can be as simple as talking to your pet as you would a young child, or as serious as believing that the animal knows better, can understand the concept of time, and holds a grudge. Unlike humans who remember every slight, every negative experience in their lives, animals live in the here and now. When your dog greets you at the door, they are happy to see you. They aren’t telling you that you’re 5 minutes late for their walk. If you’re late, you’ll know it from their dog-like behavior of tearing things up or having accidents. Giving your pet medication does not mean they will hate you. They dislike the act and taste of the medication, but in a few minutes (and with a few treats) they’ll be right back with you. There is a fine line between loving your pet and going overboard into believing that your pet understands you and will respond with human behaviors.

Animal extremist groups push the anthropomorphic tendencies of humans in every aspect of life, from those late night ASPCA commercials, to “rescuing” livestock housed in biosecure facilities, to creating legislation that suits their agenda, but does nothing to promote animal welfare. Anthropomorphism plays on human emotions and the animal extremist groups make bank on those emotions, raising millions of dollars annually, yet donating a fraction to actually helping animals.

The veterinary industry has played into anthropomorphism by referring to pet owners as “pet parents” and owner’s pets as their “fur baby” or “fur child”. Doing so has both benefitted and hurt the veterinary industry. The benefits to the industry can be easily seen in the increase of specialty medicine and large specialty animal



hospitals offering everything from cancer treatment, MRI's and cardiac pacemakers for pets. This dramatic growth of specialty veterinary practices, veterinary hospitals, pet supply stores selling all sorts of accessories, specialty foods, doggie day cares and high-end boarding facilities, etc. in the last 15 years shows the willingness of animal owners to spend more money on the health care of their pets than they have in years past. This growth has attracted the interest of major conglomerations and the pet industry has ballooned into a 35-billion-dollar market.

The Negative Impact of Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism has impacted veterinary teams in a negative way because it places unrealistic and unfair expectations on animals. Just as we should not expect a human child to act like a dog, we should not expect a dog to act like a human child. They are not equivalent to each other. Expecting a pet or any other animal to live up to the standards of human traits and display human behaviors can cause a wide array of problems.

Health Problems –

Anthropomorphism has led many animal owners to overfeed their pets. It has also led them to provide animals food items and diets that are not healthy for them. Overweight pets and pets with gastrointestinal and other nutrition-related problems are becoming a significant issue in veterinary medicine.

Many animal extremists promote vegan diets for small animals, which will kill cats and make dogs unhealthy. Their reasoning for doing that is based on their ideology of not harming animals, without taking into consideration that their pet is physiologically different from them. For example, cats are obligate carnivores. They require meat to survive, yet vegans and animal extremists say they do well on a vegan diet. Just google "Cats and vegan diets" and you'll see that every hit on the first page is from an animal extremist group or vegan.

Behavioral Problems –

Many behavioral problems directly stem from anthropomorphism and unrealistic expectations for pets and even livestock. Owners expect them to "know better," "feel guilty," and never to express their natural instincts. "He never bites, he won't bite," and "she won't kick or spook," are examples of this.

Behavioral problems and lack of training are the number one reason small animals are surrendered to shelters and large animals, like horses, are abandoned. This is a significant factor as to why we believe anthropomorphism is a threat to animal welfare. It is important to understand that your pet responds in a species appropriate way to perceived threats, not in a way that a human would.

Veterinary Visit Problems –

It is not uncommon for veterinarians and veterinary staff members to encounter patients that are difficult to handle or have significant behavioral issues that can put the pet, the owner and the veterinary staff at risk. Anthropomorphism can affect how a pet owner views how the veterinary staff handles their pet, for example objecting to the use of muzzles or other forms of restraint. It can even impact their feelings about behavior and training recommendations staff members may make by thinking: "Fifi wouldn't hurt anyone, she knows better."

When Fifi does bite a staff member, the owner then blames the staff for handling their pet too roughly, rather



than accept the responsibility of having a poorly trained animal. If you are an owner, and you know your pet is a could bite, it is best to be up front with veterinary staff and tell them ahead of time. While the sight of a muzzle on your pet might upset you, it allows veterinary staff to handle your pet in the least stressful manner, get treatments done quickly and efficiently, and in the long run, cause your pet less stress.

Compassion Fatigue in Veterinary Medicine and Animal Care

In recent years there is a crisis lurking at every animal shelter, veterinary clinic, and animal research laboratory and it is called “compassion fatigue.” This term is used often in the human medical field to describe an extreme state of tension and preoccupation with the suffering of those being helped. It can escalate to the degree of causing secondary traumatic stress for the helper. Some of the symptoms include difficulty concentrating, insomnia, physical and mental fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness.

The Suicide Crisis in Veterinary Medicine

This rise in compassion fatigue may also be linked to the rise of suicides among veterinarians and veterinary staff members. Recent studies show that veterinarians and those in the veterinary field are 3.5 times more likely to die by suicide than the general population. This trend has been made public in recent articles produced by news outlets like Time Magazine, The Washington Post, NBC News, and in numerous veterinary trade publications.

Anthropomorphism and Heightened Emotional Responses

A result of applying human characteristics to animals is often a heightened emotional response from clients when something related to their pet goes wrong, or if their pet is sick or injured. The same applies to veterinary team members that believe animals are worthy of human rights. This leads to a logical question: “Could anthropomorphism be causing a rise of compassion fatigue in the veterinary field?”

When both veterinary teams and owners refer to a pet as a “fur baby”, this can affect how they view the pet. There is no doubt that it is a difficult situation when an animal is hurt, sick, or dying. However, treating animals like children and using the same language when we refer to them creates an emotional response that can be overwhelming to veterinary staff. Instead of seeing that pet as an animal, it is easy to also involve subconscious thoughts and feelings that go along with the word “baby” and “child” or any other human-like phrase other than animal or pet.

If a veterinarian or veterinary staff member anthropomorphizes animals and subscribes to animal extremist ideologies, it begs the question: “How will they react when they have to euthanize a pet?” Will they be able to continue their day, seeing all of their patients and handling emergency situations? Could they become overwhelmed with grief and eventually end up with compassion fatigue? There are some who enter the veterinary field who cannot bring themselves to euthanize an animal, or even be present in the treatment area if one is being euthanized. Not only is this unrealistic, it also puts a burden on fellow employees, and can make them question themselves for being there.

There are several small changes that could make a big difference, and a key step is to appreciate animals for their species-specific traits and to refrain from calling animal owners “pet parents.” It is important to preserve



the emotional well-being of veterinary professionals and an essential aspect of that is by not anthropomorphizing pets or encouraging owners to do so.

Animal Extremist Tactics – Subtle Influence

Animal extremist and other non-governmental organizations are implementing a multi-prong approach to influence the veterinary industry by:

- Infiltrating universities and funding programs.
- Misleading veterinarians and veterinary staff members about large professional dog and cat breeders.
- Providing inaccurate pet population and shelter statistics to veterinarians and staff members in order to engage them in pushing “Don’t Litter - Spay-Neuter” and “Adopt Don’t Shop” type programs.
- Creating veterinary branches of their organizations and staffing them with animal extremist ideologists that happen to be veterinarians to instill trust in their philosophy.
- Pushing the concept of anthropomorphism with household pets and other animals to further blur the lines between animals and people under the law.
- Writing, funding, and marketing companion animal care and abuse-related legislation that does nothing to increase protections for animals, but does leave doors open to further restrict the rights of animal owners.
- Intentionally misleading veterinarians, veterinary students, and animal hospital staff members about the true ideology and agenda of animal extremism.

Animal Extremist Tactics – Pushing Legislation

Some of the issues animal extremist groups are working diligently on, that directly affect animal owners and their veterinarians, are listed below:

- Habeas Corpus of animals (legal personhood of animals)
- Banning pet stores from selling pets, but allowing the purchase of “rescue” and shelter animals
- Banning working animals jobs, such as carriage horses, herding dogs, horses used in cattle work, dogs used for hunting, etc.
- Trying to change horses from livestock to companion animals
- Making it harder to keep companion animals, horses and other livestock by changing housing requirements
- Working to ban performing animals, such as greyhound racing, horse racing, rodeos, and circuses
- PACT Act
- Research Animals

Each of these initiatives created by animal extremist groups influences how the public views animals, breeders, and veterinarians. Animal owners and their veterinarians must work together to persevere against the animal extremist onslaught. It is critical that we unite to ensure we continue to have high standards of animal welfare, to preserve our constitutional rights, and to maintain the ability for pet owners and veterinarians to make decisions regarding the care of pets.

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Animal Extremist Groups Target Veterinary Colleges

How did animal extremism infiltrate such a noble profession that begins in animal welfare? The root of this problem runs very deep, but just looking on the surface can give us a basic idea of what is going on. When a pet owner needs advice or medical care for their pet, it is natural to turn to their trusted veterinarian. Animal extremist groups have learned one of the best ways to reach a pet owner is through their veterinarian.

The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) is the veterinary branch of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). HSVMA has worked to get their foot in the door of many veterinary schools to push their ideology of animal rights. Infiltration begins with teachers and professors who pass down information to students, who then pass down information to their clients.

Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association Board of Directors and Leadership Council

Below is a review of the HSVMA board of directors and leadership council, which shows how deeply rooted this group is in veterinary education.

- Paula Kislak, DVM – Paula Kislak, was past president and a board member for many years of the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights, and she is a current board member of the HSUS. She has been involved with the San Diego Humane Society and The Humane Society of Greater Miami. Over the years she has participated on a number of advisory boards and activist organizations. She currently serves as a relief veterinary practitioner and is both a consultant and lobbyist for animal rights issues.
- Barry Kipperman, DVM, DACVIM, MSc - After 26 years in practice, Dr. Kipperman decided to devote the remainder of his career to animal welfare and ethics. He teaches veterinary ethics at the University of California at Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and teaches animal welfare and ethics at the University of Missouri. His particular interests include farm animal welfare, and the influence of economics on animal welfare. Dr. Kipperman is the Board President for HSVMA as well as a member of the California Veterinary Medical Association's Animal Welfare committee.
- Meredith Rives, DVM - Dr. Rives is a board member of the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights and is Chair for the Board of Animal Welfare for her municipality. Dr. Rives founded the Humane Education Program at the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine and she is the HSVMA Illinois State Representative.
- Michael Blackwell, DVM, MPH - Dr. Blackwell currently serves as the Director of the Program for Pet Health Equity at the University of Tennessee. He also chairs the Access to Veterinary Care Coalition. Previously, he served as Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Tennessee, Chief of Staff at the Office of the Surgeon General of the U.S., Deputy Director of the Food and Drug Administration Center for Veterinary Medicine, and Chief Veterinary Officer for the HSUS and U.S. Public Health Service.
- Gary Block, DVM, MS, DACVIM - Dr. Block received his Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine from Cornell University. He obtained a Master's degree from Tufts University in Animals and Public Policy, focusing his thesis on the teaching of veterinary ethics.
- Barry Kellogg, VMD - Dr. Kellogg served as Chairman of the Medicine Dept and Head of the Intern Program at Rowley Memorial Animal Hospital in Springfield, Mass., a large teaching hospital owned and operated by the Massachusetts SPCA.

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- Gwendy Reyes-Illg, DVM - Dr Reyes has been a vegan for over 20 years. In college she campaigned successfully for a voter-initiated state ban on sow gestation crates. She also served as a founding veterinary director for the highly controversial HSUS chimpanzee sanctuary named Project Chimps which is now under fire by whistleblowers. Recently Dr. Reyes earned her master's degree in philosophy at Colorado State University, with a focus on animal and veterinary medical ethics.
- Nicole Paquette, JD - Nicole Paquette is a lawyer and serves as the Chief Programs and Policy Officer for the Humane Society of the United States. She joined HSUS in 2010 as the Senior Policy Advisor to the Chief Operating Officer. She then went on to serve as the HSUS's senior state director in Texas. In 2013, she became Vice President of Wildlife Protection. While in this role she assisted with legislation that prohibited elephants from traveling to Rhode Island, California, Illinois, and New York. Prior to her tenure at HSUS, she was Senior Vice President and General Counsel for over a decade at the Animal Protection Institute/Born Free USA. She received her Juris Doctor from Vermont Law School and a Bachelor's degree in political science from San Francisco State University. She serves on the Board of Directors for Emancipet, Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, and South Florida Wildlife Center.

Animal Rights Extremism in Private Practice

In a recent article in "The Intercept", the author highlights a "popular, respected Bay Area veterinarian who had been singled out by Animal Agriculture Alliance and its industry allies as an "extremist" whose name needed to be circulated among her colleagues as some who should be "aggressively shunned." This "popular" veterinarian is Dr. Crystal Heath.

In a podcast on "Veterinary Viewpoint", Dr. Heath, a 2012 UC Davis Veterinary School graduate, a "well-respected shelter veterinarian who runs Berkeley Humane," was interviewed. She claims she has been the victim of cyberbullying by unnamed veterinary professionals who claim she is "part of an animal rights group," and to "Beware, Crystal Heath will secretly video and post it (the video) and post it on social media channels."

What Dr. Heath failed to mention is that she is a well-respected member of the SF Bay chapter of Direct Action Everywhere (DxE), an extremist group who is known for its middle of the night raids on modern farms in order to "liberate" animals. In fact, she was mentioned on DxE's SF Bay Area Facebook page as attending a "Right to Rescue Day of Action: Disrupting Amazon" in January of this year, was named "chapter member of the week in April", and named "Woman Crush Wednesday" in August of 2020. Not only is she a member of DxE, but she also serves as Operations Director of DxE's Founder, Wayne Hsiung's campaign to become Berkeley's next mayor.

Dr. Heath was asked in her "chapter member of the week" interview "what is one goal you are currently working on?" Dr. Heath's response is frightening when you consider the reach she has as a "well-respected" veterinarian. She stated "I hate talking about goals before they are finished. I think there is some study about how it makes you less likely to accomplish your goal if you talk about it. However, in broad terms, my strategic effect will come from my position of power and authority among the greater animal and governmental institutions and influencing the younger generation of veterinarians."

This, in a nutshell, is what the animal extremist groups hope to accomplish.



When Animal Ownership is Threatened – Veterinary Medicine is At Risk

The most important takeaway for veterinarians is the fact that animal extremist groups are not going to be forthright with their agenda and ideology. These groups advance and achieve their goals incrementally. They aim to end animal ownership and animals in human care, one small step at a time. Veterinarians and veterinary staff members are facing a crossroads in their profession. Are they going to support the agenda and ideology of

animal extremist groups? Will they fight for the basic tenants of animal ownership, animal welfare, and their very clients and patients? Can they continue to remain quiet about the activities of animal extremist groups? Has anthropomorphism gone too far?

Veterinarians, their staff, animal owners, and breeders all need to stand together to ensure their rights to own animals are protected.

Not only will they help secure a bright future for healthy pets and their owners, but also for the health and wellbeing of veterinarians and veterinary team members.

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