

The ACVP/STP Coalition Responds to the Continued Shortage of Veterinary Pathologists

Gary Cockerell (Director, ACVP/STP Coalition), Donald Meuten (President, ACVP),
Ricardo Ochoa (President, STP)

Recently released results of a supply and demand survey of veterinary pathologists conducted in 2007 by the American College of Veterinary Pathologists (ACVP), the American Society of Veterinary Clinical Pathology (ASVCP) and the Society of Toxicologic Pathology (STP) (http://www.toxpath.org/acvp_workforce.asp) confirm the results of a similar survey conducted in 2002 (<http://www.acvp.org/news/2002SupplyDemand/2002Supply.pdf>) – there is a continued shortage of veterinary pathologists to fill a growing number of critical positions in academia, industry and government. Comparison of the results of the two surveys, however, indicates that considerable progress has been made in the last five years, particularly on the supply (training) side. Specifically, it has become easier to recruit candidates for post-DVM pathology training, the quality of the candidate pool has improved, and there are an increased number of positions and trainees in veterinary anatomic pathology and clinical pathology training programs.

In response to the workforce shortage originally documented in the 2002 survey, the ACVP/STP Coalition for Veterinary Pathology Fellows was established to provide a unified mechanism to solicit and allocate funds to train additional much needed veterinary pathologists. After approximately four years of operations, this unique educational initiative has established partnerships between academia and the biopharmaceutical industry to create 22 new training positions, including 15 anatomic pathology residencies, 3 clinical pathology residencies and 4 post-residency PhD pathology research positions. These positions were funded by Bristol-Myers Squibb, Charles River Laboratories, Eli Lilly, Genentech, GlaxoSmithKline, Merck, Pfizer, sanofi-aventis, Schering-Plough and Wyeth. Importantly, sponsors who funded the initial 3 year training positions have since renewed funding for another set of positions.

“The visionary participation of these world-class biopharmaceutical companies and contract research organizations, and their commitment to the training of future veterinary pathologists attests to their recognition that data submitted by these companies to regulatory agencies must always be of the highest quality,” noted Dr. Ricardo Ochoa, President of the STP. “By assuring the supply of well trained veterinary pathologists, some of whom will likely become employed in private industry, these organizations are planning for the continued accuracy of decisions on the safety and efficacy of new chemical entities in the future.”

Sponsors provide support for stipend, tuition and fees, benefits, travel and educational supplies for three years. In addition to support for the training positions themselves, other sponsors have supplied unrestricted contributions for important enabling activities of the Coalition. Companies that have offered this form of support include Allergan, Aperio, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Burroughs-Wellcome Fund, Elsevier,

Experimental Pathology Laboratories, GEMpath, Histo-Research Scientific Labs, Integrated Lab Systems, Millennium-Takeda, The Leyden Group and Wyeth. Taken together, \$5.2M in commitments has been raised over the past 4 years. At the conclusion of their training, Fellows have no pay-back obligation or commitment to sponsors other than to complete the ACVP certification examination and pursue a career in veterinary pathology.

The new positions were awarded on a competitive application basis to 14 different North American training institutions including Colorado State University, Iowa State University, The Ohio State University, Michigan State University, North Carolina State University, Purdue University, Texas A&M University, University of California-Davis, University of Georgia, University of Guelph, University of Illinois-Urbana, University of Minnesota, University of Pennsylvania and Washington State University.

The Coalition has also established mechanisms to ensure active interchange between Fellows, their training institutions and sponsoring companies. Fellows remain at their home university during the period of training, but perform externships at their sponsor's site to enhance their academic training and to experience the role of contemporary veterinary pathologists in the modern biopharmaceutical environment. A pathologist from each sponsoring company is appointed as a mentor and the respective academic institutions provide special faculty appointments for these mentors, which allow them to more fully participate in the Fellows' training program and to interact with other trainees. A Coalition Scientific Conference, held in association with either the ACVP or the STP annual meetings, provides a forum for Fellows to present results of their training and receive feedback from their peers and mentors, and also for members of academia and industry to present issues of mutual interest. Additional information is available on the Coalition web site <http://www.vetpathcoalition.org/index.cfm>, including all presentations from the 2008 Coalition Scientific Conference.

“From the ACVP perspective, this is one of those win-win programs in which we are fortunate to participate,” commented Dr. Donald Meuten, President of the ACVP. “These fellowships provide opportunities for pathologists in training to explore multiple career options before they commit to a specific job or career path. The more carefully trainees look at opportunities, the more likely they will be to choose the one that best matches their professional and personal goals. The program is so successful among current Fellows that many candidates for residencies now specify they would like to be considered for a Coalition position. For employers this means job satisfaction and stable employment. Our most valuable resource at universities, industry or any other sector is our personnel. I do not believe there is a comparable program associated with any of the other specialty colleges in the AVMA. This program makes the ACVP unique, stronger and sets an example for the other specialty colleges to follow.”

Dr. Gary Cockerell, Director of the Coalition, attributes its initial success to (1) a well-documented need for veterinary pathologists, (2) the willingness of academia and industry to partner for the betterment of the discipline, (3) the endorsement of the ACVP and STP, two of the foremost pathology organizations in the world, (4) training focused

on core disciplines of veterinary pathology, and (5) mutual benefits for participating trainees, their training institutions and sponsoring organizations. There remains an ongoing shortage of veterinary pathologists, largely due to the retirement of a large segment of the current workforce, and employers continue to indicate not enough pathologists are being trained. However, it is clear that in the absence of more traditional government-funded programs, private industry is willing to channel financial resources to the ACVP/STP Coalition for Veterinary Pathology Fellows to address this national need.