



SAVMA Statement on Veterinary Student Duty Hours

From its inception in 1969, formerly known as the National Conference of Student Chapters of the AVMA (NCSCAVMA), the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA) continues to work toward its single mission “to support, empower, and inspire all veterinary students in improving their lives, education and career, along with securing a better future for our profession through collaboration with our parent organization, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).” Veterinary students’ wellbeing, at every stage of their veterinary training, and in all facet of their lives, is therefore at the heart of SAVMA’s mission. For this reason, SAVMA national finds it important to make a clear and unambiguous stance on the needs of veterinary students on their clinical rotations.

For over four decades, the correlation between the wellbeing of medical professionals and the quality of healthcare organizations has been documented and understood in the human profession¹⁻². Burnout, defined as the emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduction in efficiency that results from the constant exposure due to stressors faced on the job³, has tremendous negative impact on the personal lives of our medical professionals⁴. Despite the years of knowledge and data on burnout, 44% of US physicians continue to report experiencing it in some form according to the 2019 Medscape Physician Lifestyle Report⁵. In a direct correlation with the number of hours worked, the report shows that physicians who work 71 or more hours are 21% more likely to experience burnout than those who work 31-40 hours a week.

The result of burnout in the medical profession can vary from difficulty in maintaining a healthy work-life balance and losing passion for one’s work, to serious detriments to the health of the healthcare provider themselves. Coronary Heart Disease (CHD), shorter life expectancy, problematic alcohol use, depression, and suicide are only some of the reported negative consequences associated with burnout known today⁶⁻⁷. A 2018 study on 42,473 physicians concluded that physician burnout was directly linked to increase in poorer quality of care due to low professionalism, reduced patient satisfaction, and a 2-fold increased odds for unsafe care, all statistics found in higher concentration among early-career physicians⁸.

To address some of these clear dangers of burnout and depression, the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) has outlined guidelines regarding wellbeing and fatigue mitigation, encouraging host institutions to implement changes such as to limit duty hours, in order to safeguard against the negative effects of chronic and acute sleep loss⁹⁻¹⁰.

As early career individuals in similar teaching environments, veterinary students are not immune to these challenges. Though veterinary medicine does not have the extensive research done in human medicine, parallels to human medicine as well as the specific challenges of veterinary medicine warrant immediate action. In the largest published evaluation regarding

type and severity of medical errors in veterinary hospitals, a comprehensive 2019 study shows that medical errors have significant impact on our veterinary patients, from drug errors to poor communication, resulting in as much as 15% of these errors leading to the harm of a patient ¹¹. In addition to safe and proper patient care, wellbeing of our veterinary professionals is of equal concern. The CDC reported in 2015 that 1 in 11 veterinarians had serious psychological distress and 1 in 6 experienced suicidal ideation since leaving veterinary school ¹².

Prior to completion of their DVM degrees, veterinary students also face various challenges that have led to the loss of several students to suicide over the last few years. Many confounding factors have been reported by students to affect their wellbeing in the clinic, from the inability to consume a decent meal or properly take care of bodily functions, the lack of appropriate rest periods between shifts, to the inability to follow through with mental health or other medical appointments due to fear of repercussions. In order to provide the best opportunity for veterinary students to thrive and successfully complete their veterinary education, SAVMA has provided a list of guidelines that aim to address the very issues veterinary student face on their clinical rotations. These guidelines were developed with the knowledge that not all schools operate equally and are an attempt to balance the needs of a rigorous program with the wellbeing of students. Additionally, though SAVMA does not have jurisdiction over interns and residents, the organization strongly supports these views for both entities.

It is important to note that by virtue of being guidelines, these statements are not requirements and therefore not enforceable by SAVMA. Nevertheless, they represent the ideals and values of SAVMA and the various AVMA accredited veterinary institutions are strongly encouraged to follow them. Students recognize that they are integral to the success and daily function of their teaching hospital, but SAVMA believes their work must be balanced by appropriate levels of support staff and faculty to ensure student wellbeing. SAVMA aims for these guidelines to serve as a reliable backbone in particular for veterinary students on clinical rotations so they can be aware of the standards their national representation recommends with their health and wellbeing in mind.

The information provided within these guidelines was made possible thanks to feedback from students from the following veterinary institutions:

Atlantic Veterinary College	University of Illinois	Purdue University
Auburn University	Iowa State University	University of Pennsylvania
Colorado State University	Kansas State University	University of Tennessee
Cornell University	University of Minnesota	Virginia-Maryland RCVN
University of Florida	North Carolina State University	Washington State University
University of Glasgow	The Ohio State University	University of Wisconsin
	Oregon State University	

References may be found via this link: <https://goo.gl/2pGggy>