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Disrupt the status quo

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# Disrupt the status quo

“We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 1986

Dear Editor,

As a proud and participatory member of VECCS, EVECCS, and ACVECC, I have learned much from our members and have cherished our collective strength. I read with excitement and admiration the Special Article by Odunayo et al<sup>1</sup> on the plans and thoughtful approach to increase awareness and action toward improvement of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our profession. We have done great things and have much of which to be proud. To date our work has focused primarily on patient care, regional disaster management, and the support of research on common clinical problems. However, to harness our power for enhanced global social justice, I want to ensure our community acts as a voice for the silent, uplifts the oppressed, and uses our position of privilege to level a very uneven playing field.

The Black Lives Matter movement arose after the murder of Trayvon Martin at the hands of George Zimmerman, the vigilante in Sanford, Florida, in 2012. It did not gain much traction or wide acceptance until the murder of George Floyd. This reawakening of our racial divide has created a worldwide effort to recognize its continued impact after the arrival of the first enslaved people to the shores of North America 400 years ago. Sadly, racist policies and practices remain active and continue to expand in many countries and cultures.

In response to the energy behind this social justice movement, the world began to move in the opposite direction. The rise of authoritarian governments and the continuation of racist policies and practices continue to erode our democracy. Those with power and privilege continue to spearhead programs, pass laws, and spread propaganda and misinformation to maintain their superiority. I now demand VECCS, EVECCS, and ACVECC position our organizations as the leaders in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity for our profession.

To further this discussion and expand on the main goals of the ACVECC DEI Committee, I recommend the following improvements.

1. Ensure our organizations' offices, as well as locations of our symposia, are located in states/countries with nondiscriminatory laws and policies that protect an individual's right to vote.

As an example, the 10-campus system of the University of California prohibits state-funded travel to a state that “authorizes discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.”<sup>2</sup>

Sadly, there are currently 18 states on that list.<sup>3</sup> To put this into context, our house officers and faculty colleagues cannot use travel funds provided by our School of Veterinary Medicine to attend IVECCS in places like Nashville, San Antonio, or Orlando. Although this may not be a financial hardship for the faculty, it is a professional (and personal) conflict of interest to attend meetings in these 18 states if we are to uphold the Principles of Community of our institution<sup>4</sup> and the goals of the ACVECC DEI Committee. Indeed, many of us personally refuse to attend or participate in conferences in these jurisdictions regardless of reimbursement.

2. Use women- and minority-owned vendors and industry partners for common business needs as well as our large-scale events and conferences.
3. Create clear and timely posts of our mission/vision/position statements that reflect our collective acceptance of cultural humility, diversity, and community.
4. Provide a more inclusive schedule for meetings, conferences, and certification examinations that avoids all sabbaths and religious holidays.
5. Acknowledge the indigenous lands upon which we convene.<sup>5</sup>

The world now watches as Russia brutalizes the citizens of Ukraine, another example of oppression and authoritarianism. The opposite response of support, peace, and unity is ours to uphold with even more passion and strength. The time is now. I refuse to be part of the problem. Inaction equals acceptance. Silence, by default, is a sign of approval. I invite you to join me and use your power and privilege as professionals to disrupt the status quo.

Respectfully, Karl Jandrey

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## REFERENCES

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3. <https://oag.ca.gov/ab1887>. Accessed July 30, 2022.
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## THE INSTITUTIONS RESPOND

Dear Editor,

We appreciate to the opportunity to respond to and thank Professor Jandrey for his powerful and thoughtful letter as well as the recommendations directed to the Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Society (VECCS), European Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Society (EVECCS), and American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care (ACVECC). We agree with the foundational contents of his letter and appreciate the action points provided to enhance justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion in our profession.

We (VECCS and ACVECC) recently conducted strategic planning and the recommendations provided are very timely in that regard. The strategic planning process is a formal opportunity to reflect on our mission/vision statements and ensure that they define both of our organizations commitment to inclusivity and creating a welcoming environment for all. We are dedicated to aligning all aspects of our organizations so that we fight against ignorance and fight for respect, diversity, inclusivity, and opportunities for all of our members.

We acknowledge that VECCS' offices are located in a state that is on the list prohibited by the state of California for travel using state funding and that some of our upcoming meetings have been scheduled in states on this same list. The variables behind identifying meeting spaces are very complex and those decisions are made years in advance. It is not unexpected that more states may join the lists banned by the State of California, especially with the dynamic political climate in the United States of America. We aspire for our organizations to represent a safe place for our members and for the veterinary community. We need to represent and be accessible to all members and adopting the same policies as the state of California will limit access for members who practice emergency and critical care in these states. We feel that it is unfair to our staff and membership within these states to paint them with the broad brush of their state politics. In addition, we believe that constructive engagement and active conversation may be the best way to make progress. Another way to make a statement is to demonstrate our strength and purposefully support DEI when in states with laws that go against DEI initiatives. Specific targeted events at 2022 IVECCS will embrace and spotlight underrepresented minority groups, such as Pride VMC, IVECCS Español, and a DEI-specific reception as an opportunity to collaborate and connect. We also recognize the importance of acknowledging indigenous lands when we meet. We

encourage active involvement and continued conversation on how to best support educational opportunities for all our members.

We have created scholarships, including DEI-specific scholarships to financially support VECCS members attending IVECCS who might not otherwise have the means to attend. Our organizations have funded and participated in important charitable efforts concurrent with IVECCS in many states, intentionally serving communities or organizations in need, including spay and neuter clinics for indigenous persons in Arizona, restoring Animal Shelters ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, and training Police and Search and Rescue handlers first aid and CPR for their canine partners that serve underrepresented communities.

We have also discussed more community outreach to demonstrate and encourage younger persons from underserved communities to consider employment in veterinary medicine. ACVECC has recently amended its residency training standards to include DEI training as part of the requirement for program completion.

We do make every effort to avoid as many religious holidays as possible when identifying dates for meetings, conferences, and certifying examinations. We recognize that weekend days are regarded as a day of rest for some religions. We acknowledge the importance of making inclusive scheduling a priority; however, it is not feasible to avoid all days that might be significant to all groups. We also understand the crucial need to support minority- and women-owned vendors and plan to be more intentional when a making those decisions. VECCS has directed that their investments are prioritized to support minority- and women-owned businesses.

Prior to the strategic planning meeting, both ACVECC and VECCS established DEI committees who have identified goals and plans to make DEI an ongoing core value in every part of our organizations. We welcome and encourage our members to join the DEI committees and subcommittees and help with the ongoing initiatives. Take a stand and have a voice with us—there is power in numbers. We will take a stand and support one another.

Respectfully,

The VECCS Board of Directors and ACVECC Board of Regents

## FURTHER INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

Dear Editor,

We like to thank Professor Jandrey for his letter and for raising such important subjects of diversity, equality, and inclusion that affect all veterinarians and people across the globe. These should be core values for all. It is unthinkable that in 2022 people are still discriminated against because of their race, sexual orientation, or country of birth but unfortunately daily events are here to remind us that these acts do happen frequently. It feels more shocking coming from countries considered to be world leaders, as recent events in the United States have been felt internationally, though sadly exists in many other countries across the globe. Both the European Emergency and Critical Care Society (EVECCS) and the European College of Veterinary and

Critical Care (ECVECC) truly believe in these values and for this reason we are standing behind Professor Jandrey's letter and we praise the work of the ACVECC DEI committee. EVECCS and ECVECC during our recent joint general board meeting have discussed and agreed upon the need to create a DEI committee to make improvements in both organizations' approach and understanding of these complex human rights and political issues, focusing for most of our membership on the European situation. We will endeavor to cooperate and collaborate with the ACVECC and VECCS DEI committees.

We agree wholeheartedly that we want all attendees at conferences, seminars, and educational opportunities as well as everyone

attending university and, in their workplace to be free from any discrimination, being included and treated with equality. Making sure that the European conferences are held in places where all attendees and indeed all people feel safe and included is of paramount importance. We hope to see as many colleagues as possible from across the pond at our European conferences where we hope your safety, beliefs, and freedoms are respected.

Respectfully,

Chiara Valtolina, DVM, PhD, DACVECC, DECVECC (EVECCS president) and Dominic Barfield, BSc, BVSc, MVetMed, DACVECC, DECVECC (ECVECC president)