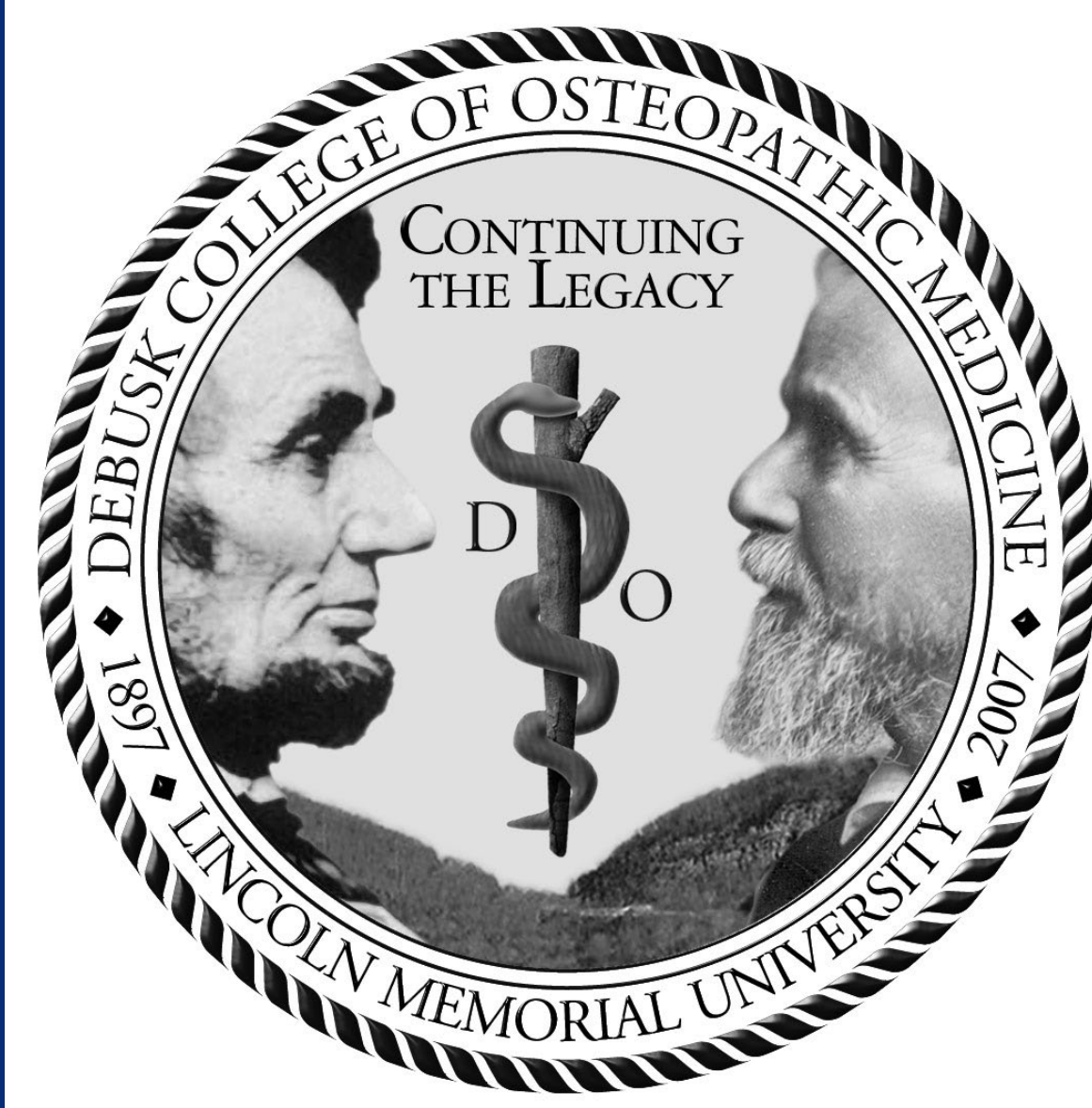


Identifying solutions to the veterinary workforce crisis

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Abstract

With growing rates of burnout, mental disparities, and workplace shortages within the field of veterinary medicine, the necessity to research possible solutions is urgent. This narrative review will summarize research on interventions, strategies, and technologies that may improve veterinary workplace workflow and environment.

Previous research has established that depression, anxiety, and burnout risk are significantly more prevalent within this field compared to other occupational groups. It is hypothesized that factors leading to burnout in regard to practicing veterinarians can be attributed to the lack of medical specialists and minimal mental health intervention.

The lack of second line providers in veterinary medicine creates a larger strain on veterinarians due to high patient load, unlike other medical sciences in which several types of specialists can provide care such as physician assistants and nurse practitioners.

There is an expanding need to implement interventions in order to improve the declining psychological state found in the occupation of veterinary medicine, improve workplace efficiency, and strengthen the veterinary workforce. Interventions such as mental health programs, coping strategies for stress, business management software, business management training, and the creation of new career pathways may work towards combating the adversities associated with this field.

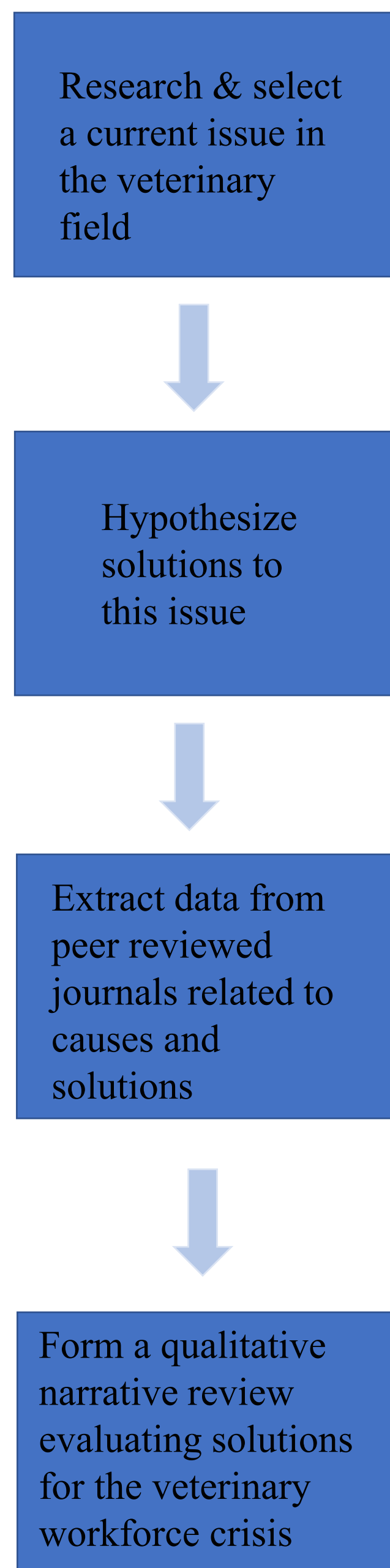
Introduction

As the demand for services increases within the fast paced field of veterinary medicine, the need for workplace interventions has become increasingly prevalent as well. The disconnect between supply and demand has created a major workforce crisis with implications in both the professional and economic sector of veterinary medicine.

In this paper, we will be exploring solutions and interventions for the veterinary workplace crisis. The American Veterinary Medical Association reported that inconsistent volumes of clients in addition to pandemic related operational adjustments have been large contributors towards increasing burn-out and turnover rates (2). The lack of staff consistency and unequal distribution of workload has led to an overall loss of employee longevity, elevating pressure on veterinarians to fill in the gaps.

Loss of productivity due to burn out contributes to the annual loss of \$1-2 billion in revenue (4), which emphasizes the complex impact of poor work balance and the need for intervention. We believe factors such as increasing employee retention, longevity, and team productivity, will aid in achieving workload balance thus alleviating the excessive pressure on veterinarians.

Methods



Results

- As of 2020 the turnover rate for doctors of veterinary medicine has been 16%
- 24.5 percent of males and 36.7 percent of females in veterinary medicine have experienced depressive episodes since veterinary school
- The American veterinary society reported 1 in 6 veterinarians have considered suicide
- Burnout rates are significantly reduced in participants of acceptance and commitment training programs (ACT)
- The role of second line care providers increase productivity and alleviate overall pressure in clinical settings
- Early preparation business management improves ability to combat future workplace crisis

Discussion

The veterinary workplace crisis may be reduced or eliminated if preventative measures are implemented early in training. Providing students with essential knowledge and skills through applicable business management courses sets a baseline level of readiness for challenging and demanding work environments (5). Excessive workload and mental health negligence are main drivers of burnout; however, the risk may be reduced via special programs such as acceptance and commitment training (ACT) (6). Acceptance and commitment therapy is a form of psychotherapy which works to aid individuals in staying focused on the present and allow for all other thoughts to be accepted without negativity. Significant reduction in occupational distress, burden transfer, and work-related burnout was shown to be a product of student participation in ACT. A key solution in combating workplace crisis includes implementation of mandatory training for the purpose of reducing task overload. Despite the shown effectiveness of improvement in anxiety, depression, and burnout, regulation has not been colloquially implemented. Institutions which do grant access to training programs are not equally accessible to all, however, recent studies show asynchronous modules are uniformly adequate (7). Participants' results were comparable to those who attended in person training; marketing asynchronous training modules as efficient and convenient (7). Organizational interventions such as implementation of professional development and management workshops assist in creating coordinated team plans to ensure equal distribution of tasks. increase team productivity and reduce individual exhaustion. The larger strain on veterinarians may be resolved with the addition of second line specialists. Additional care providers would vastly improve productivity by allowing veterinarians to combat burnout by reducing their workload. The creation of new roles will permit veterinarians to solely focus on portions of cases which efficiently utilizes the depth of their medical education (8). Second line providers have shown to maximize efficiency in hospitals by synergistically increasing patient load and decreasing workload (9).

Future Directions: It is clear that current working conditions in the field of veterinary medicine are causing a multitude of damages in relation to professional success and mental health. Future studies should assess changes in burnout, anxiety, depression, and overall contentment with workload after the implementation of solutions listed in this study.

References



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