

The Need for Sustained Veterinary Education

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Currently, there are approximately 87 veterinarians practicing in Jamaica, with the majority being employed in government regulatory work or private clinical practice (involving preventative medicine and the diagnosis and treatment of various illnesses in pets, food-producing animals and horses).



This figure represents a veterinarian: human population ratio of 1:30,000 which is grossly inadequate, especially when compared to other neighbouring North American and Caribbean countries with ratios between 1 per 2000 and per 10,000.

The inadequacy is blatantly seen in the lack of clinical veterinary services in many rural parishes, where farmers and pet owners are left without veterinary care for their animals, and has also led to the proliferation of illegal practitioners which poses a threat, not just to animal welfare, but also to food safety and human health.

Two industries which contribute greatly to Jamaica's economic development are tourism and agriculture. With our focus on increasing earnings from agriculture,

the demand for veterinarians in public health inspection and certification of foods of animal origin for export is growing. Also, with the changes to be brought forth through the new Animal Importation Act, our corridors will now open to more tourists vacationing with their pets and as such, there will be a need for more veterinarians in border control and to provide clinical services for these animals when the need arises. Unfortunately, in some tourist locations, there is still a lack of emergency clinical veterinary services and there is also a growing demand for veterinary services in zoos, and other animal-affiliated local tourist excursions. Additionally, the stray dog/cat overpopulation causes our country bad publicity amongst potential tourists and, though this is being addressed through spay/neuter clinics, greater manpower is needed.

As it stands, the majority of Jamaican veterinary medical students are trained at the University of the West Indies (Trinidad) with approximately four Jamaican veterinarians registering to practice locally each year. Unfortunately, with the recent removal of the government subsidy, Jamaican students are being required to pay USD\$ 27, 000 (JMD\$3.4 million) in tuition per year for the 5-year programme,



Veterinary students enjoying an Anatomy lab at the UWI-SVM, St. Augustine, Trinidad.

which is prohibitive to most, and will likely lead to a decrease in the number of Jamaican students pursuing a career in veterinary medicine locally. For the sustained development of our nation, we cannot allow this to happen, and some intervention must take place urgently. Training of students in the field of veterinary medicine is indispensable to meeting the increasing

demand locally and ensuring continuity for future generations.

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