

Ask A Vet: The First Veterinarian

Sunday, June 28, 2015

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

I am reading a book about veterinarians this summer and am wondering who the first veterinarian was and where he/she was from. I am interested in studying to be a veterinarian when I go to college.

-Wondering in Wakarusa

Dear Reader,

That's a great question and I want to encourage you to pursue a career in veterinary medicine. It is a privilege to be a veterinarian and after 41 years I am still having fun! It is difficult to determine who the first veterinarian was as I am sure man has attempted to help animals since they were first domesticated.

The first recorded history of organized veterinary medicine was in India around 1800 years before Christ. A Hindu named Salihotra practiced and wrote detailed observations about veterinary medicine, including information about 700 medicinal plants and over 100 surgical instruments. Hindu scholars wrote the Vedas which was an ethical guide for all people. This guide contained information on medical treatments of both man and animals. The first records of veterinary hospitals were also in ancient India, they were established by the state and the veterinarians who staffed them were paid by the state. This Vedas guide stated that medicine was developed by man's observation of animals and that all medical science originated with veterinary medicine.

Civilizations that developed later in history until the 19th century were concerned mainly with equine medicine due to the horse's huge contribution to the transportation and mobility in these periods of history. In ancient India veterinary practitioners treated all species of animals and there were even veterinarians that specialized in different species. This occurred mainly because their religion and culture believed in reincarnation and man and animals had the same destiny. They held the health care of animals in the highest esteem as well as the status of Salihotra and his colleagues.

In about the third or fourth century AD a fellow named Apsyrus became known as the father of veterinary medicine. His writings on veterinary medicine contributed significantly to the treatment of animals. In 1762 a veterinary school was established in Lyons, France to study animal anatomy and diseases. By 1825 there were 30 veterinary schools in 12 European countries. Today there are over 200 veterinary colleges in the world and veterinary medicine is on the cutting edge of medical research that benefits both humans and animals.

Hopefully this answers your question and helps you to understand how the profession began and how it evolved to the present day.

-Dr. Jerry Sellon