

Joint Statement from AAVMC/AVMA Regarding Mental Health and Suicide in the Veterinary Profession

March 8, 2021

This has been a difficult year for many, and in the past week we have heard reports of veterinary colleagues who have died by suicide. Mental health concerns are complex and multi-faceted, and although we may not fully understand what an individual is experiencing, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) know that our profession can work to offer hope and help save lives. There are supports and resources available for those personally struggling—and for those searching for a way to best support a colleague or loved one who is struggling. We are not alone in veterinary medicine. We share our grief and concerns with many of our fellow health professionals. There is hope and a path forward with compassion, connection, evidence-based practices, and working in collaboration with suicide prevention experts.

In November 2019, a [toolkit for colleges of veterinary medicine](#) was created by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP) in partnership with the AVMA and the AAVMC. This toolkit provides guidance in the event of a death by suicide of a student within a school or college of veterinary medicine. This toolkit contains strategies for helping the veterinary medical community:

- Best practices for how college leaders and staff respond in the immediate aftermath of a suicide
- Strategies for helping the community grieve and cope in the short and long-term
- Safe reporting guidelines for working with the media and community partners
- Information on how to safely memorialize individuals, and reduce the risk of suicide contagion by supporting community members who may be vulnerable
- Next steps for suicide prevention

In September 2020, a similar [toolkit for veterinary workplaces](#) was created by the ASFP and the AVMA in partnership with the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, Veterinary Medical Association Executives and the Veterinary Hospital Manager's Association.

Because of the risk of suicide contagion related to the amount, duration, prominence, and content of media coverage, it is important that media reporting adheres to [safe reporting guidelines](#). When we share news about an individual's death by suicide, it is very important that the information shared is accurate, factual, consistent with harm reduction measures, and honors the family's requests, including any requests for privacy.

Media posts and postvention efforts must also take into consideration the cultural diversity of everyone affected by a suicide, including the family, workplace, and community. Culture may significantly affect the way people view and respond to suicide and death. Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to the beliefs and customs of the decedent's family and community, and potential perceptions regarding individuals outside of the family or community intervening to provide support.

The AVMA's Jen Brandt, Director of Wellbeing, Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives, and the AAVMC's Makenzie Peterson, Director for Wellbeing, will be hosting a webinar for the veterinary community on a systems-based approach to supporting mental health and suicide on Thursday, March 18th, from

1pm-3pm EST. This webinar will provide information, education, and support, with resources developed in collaboration with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Webinar registration information will be forthcoming.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Paul Lunn".

Paul Lunn, BVSc, PhD
AAVMC President

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Doug Kratt, DVM".

Doug Kratt, DVM
AVMA President