



September 8, 2019

## **PRESS RELEASE**

The Jamaica Veterinary Medical Association notes with great interest the announcement by the Government that it will increase the number of medical students receiving an 80% subsidy on tuition at UWI-Mona from 55 to 102. While we are very happy for the human medical students and colleagues who will benefit, we are forced to ask the question “what about us?”

Veterinary medicine remains the most under-served arm of the medical professions in Jamaica with a ratio of approximately 1 veterinarian to 29,000 of the country’s human population. In most other countries, including many others in CARICOM, the ratio is between 1:2,000 and 1:10,000. The profession encompasses broad areas of practice from the management of health and wellness in animals of all types, to food safety and security and the protection of human health. In the era of One Health, recognizing the inextricable links between human, animal and environmental health, it is essential that the veterinary profession be nurtured and bolstered in our country as a part of meeting our sustainable development goals.

In 2015, the Government of Jamaica did the opposite by ending all subsidies to Jamaican students of veterinary medicine at the UWI-St. Augustine in Trinidad – the ONLY truly regional veterinary school in CARICOM (the others being US offshore schools). New students were not even informed of the change until they arrived at the University in Trinidad to matriculate, being told they had to pay US\$27,000 per year up from US\$4000 – far out of reach for them all.

The JVMA successfully lobbied on the students’ behalf to have the subsidy reinstated for that class. (<http://jvma.org/newsarchive/vetstudentfunding.html>) They graduate next year. However, the Ministry of Education stated that they would not fund students in any subsequent years. Attempts by the Association to negotiate for the granting of at least 2 or 3 scholarships per year, based on specific selection criteria, were met with basically “We’d like to, but we have no money.”

Well, if the Government of Jamaica can find the funds to cover 102 human medical students per year – up from 55, it is hard to accept that they cannot find the funds give a similar subsidy to 3 vets! Is the Government saying that veterinary medicine has no role in the future of the country? If not, what is the process for determining how student subsidies are allocated?

***Committed to Advancing Veterinary Medicine and the Nation’s Health***



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The Government has to realize that it NEEDS to pay more attention to animal health matters and the greater utilization of veterinary medical expertise in all relevant areas of health – and there are many. For that we need more vets across the island. For that we need to train more vets. Whether for food, livelihood, companionship or ecosystem services, our own human health and well-being depends on it!

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