

Thursday, May 11, 2006

To: Idaho Board of Veterinary Medicine
From: Brad Williams, DVM
Campus Veterinarian, University of Idaho
Re: Foreign Graduate Licensing

Dear Board Members,

At the request of the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB), I spoke with Karen Ewing shortly after your January meeting regarding foreign trained graduates and the Board's plan on adopting or not adopting AAVSB's Program for the Assessment of Veterinary Education Equivalence (PAVE). Because of my schedule I missed responding to AAVSB's request prior to your January meeting. As Karen and I spoke we realized there is some confusion regarding how foreign trained veterinarians may receive an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG) or AAVSB PAVE certificate. Karen asked if I would provide an explanation of these programs, hence this letter. Both organizations have details of their programs on their websites.

ECFVG - <http://www.avma.org/education/ecfvg/default.asp>

PAVE - <http://www.aavsb.org/PAVE/PAVEHome.aspx>

Both programs are similar in many ways, but historically have differed in the details. In doing some research for this letter, I found those differences are becoming less noticeable. Historically, both certification programs have offered two different routes by which a candidate may achieve a certificate of educational equivalence – a clinical training/evaluation mechanism and an examination mechanism. Historically, those state licensing boards that recognize ECFVG have not recognized a difference in how a candidate achieved an ECFVG certificate, including Idaho. Several state licensing boards adopted PAVE before the VCSA was implemented, and now that the VCSA is implemented the PAVE certificates issued by both these mechanisms are also non-distinguishable.

Both programs (PAVE and ECFVG) require graduation from a veterinary college recognized by the World Health Organization World Veterinary Directory prior to certification. Both organizations require completion of an English proficiency examination. Both organizations have required passing some type of written examination prior to certification. For the clinical training/evaluate pathway, the ECFVG program required the Evaluated Clinical Year to occur post-graduation. The PAVE program allowed the clinical year to occur prior to graduation with restrictions on stage in school at which the training was completed and written verification from the AVMA accredited school providing training that foreign students were being held to the same standards as their regularly enrolled students. The AVMA felt this undermined the accreditation process because it was students from non-accredited schools who were getting PAVE Evaluated Clinical Experience pre-graduation, which removed the pressure from the foreign schools to pursue AVMA accreditation. The ECFVG required post-graduation evaluation of clinical skills.

Another major difference between programs has been in the examination used. The ECFVG had used the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) as part of the ECFVG certification. AAVSB felt this was inappropriate and lead to excessive exposure of the exam test database. There were some candidates which had taken the examination well into the double digit number of times and still had not passed. The NAVLE also did not address pre-clinical training. In response, PAVE developed the Qualifying Examination which both pathways (Evaluated Clinical Experience and VCSA) had to complete before entering the evaluated clinical year or the taking the VCSA. The Qualifying Examination has been tested against students in AVMA accredited schools and proven an effective tool at assessing pre-clinical training.

A third issue has been stepwise progression through programs. In the PAVE program, all components are a step-wise progression, not being allowed to go on to another step until the first is completed (application -> English proficiency -> Qualifying Examination -> Evaluated Clinical Experience or VCSA -> graduation -> certification). Historically, this was not true in the ECFVG, with the English proficiency occurring after NAVLE and NAVLE given as part of the ECFVG certification process.

The ECFVG has been undergoing several major changes over the last few years in response to continued pressure from AAVSB member boards, state veterinary associations, and the presence of PAVE itself. It now has a stepwise progression, the AVMA has recognized the flaw in utilizing the NAVLE as part of the ECFVG certification process and has removed it as part of their certification, is developing their own equivalent to PAVE's Qualifying Examination, and beginning in 2006, the AVMA has discontinued the Evaluated Clinical Year route of certification. Although I feel confident this was largely due to not being able to effectively fight PAVE's stance on the Evaluated Clinical Experience being allowed pre-graduation, I think this could long-term be a good thing. Inconsistency in how evaluation of clinical experience was applied to ECFVG candidates within and across sites was one of the main problems with the AVMA's program. Unfortunately, if they are not careful at maintaining quality assurance within their CPE program, the same can still happen with the CPE as it is administered at several different schools throughout the world on a contract basis. There is also continued potential for schools to pass foreign graduates just to have more come take their CPE test and make more money on the certification process.

As the ECFVG's CPE and PAVE's VCSA examination processes mature, I can see both organizations going to only a testing method because of the difficulties associated with assuring consistent application of clinical training/evaluation across students and schools. Long-term, I would not be surprised at all to see the veterinary licensing process change for all licensees to a mechanism similar to that used in human medicine, with the two stage examination process developed for the foreign graduates being applied to our regular US graduates for AVMA accredited schools.

I still find it quite foolish from the standpoint of cost, time, and effort that both organizations can't put their differences aside and have one program. We are duplicating test databases, duplicating administrative costs, making reciprocity between states more difficult, and continuing fostering a wedge between the profession and the licensing agencies where it is not needed.

I strongly encourage the Board to fully adopt PAVE. It is a sound program, of equal or greater quality than ECFVG in all respects, and it is owned and managed by an organization of which the board is a member – AAVSB. The Attorney Generals Office can counsel you better than I, but it seems like you will be hard pressed to defend not accepting PAVE if legally challenged, particularly by an Idaho resident. The public history of many quality control problems associated with ECFVG not mentioned in this letter and the high quality of the PAVE program would handcuff your defense.

If you have any further questions please feel free to contact me. I'm sure someone from the current PAVE Board or AAVSB would be glad to provide additional information also.

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Cc: Charlotte Ronan, Executive Director, American Association of Veterinary State Boards