Two years ago, at the World Congress in Singapore, I was privileged to accept the role of president of WSAVA. That time seems long distant and we now move in a very different world. After the record-breaking Singapore event and the successful 2019 Toronto Congress, 2020 has been, for all of us no matter where we live, defined and impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. To quote Dickens – ‘it was the best of times, it was the worst of times’ – certainly my presidency is a tale of two very different years.

However, through these times of adversity, the global veterinary profession has shown its resilience and strength. And I believe our WSAVA community has been exemplary in its leadership and its support for animal health and welfare and for the societies we serve. I am honoured to have had the opportunity to work with all of you through these difficult times.

2019 –2020 Key achievements

‘Shaping the Future’ at WSAVA#2019
The annual gathering of our global community at World Congress, in Toronto in July, saw the first of our ‘Shaping the Future’ lectures - global discussions on key issues affecting our members. The lecture and expert panel were led by Dr Nienke Endenburg, Chair of our Professional Wellness Group, who discussed the findings of our research into global veterinary wellbeing, to which many members kindly contributed. The results were greeted with great interest and reported widely in veterinary media around the world. They are currently being prepared for scientific publication. We thank our colleagues at CVMA for helping us to run another stimulating and successful World Congress.

Launching the world’s first One Health Certificate
Towards the end of the 2019, our One Health Committee launched the first Certificate Program to focus on the importance of companion animals in the One Health paradigm. Even within the veterinary profession, One Health has generally been considered in context of production animals, wildlife, the environment and human health. The growing significance of companion animals in society and the importance of the human-animal bond is not yet fully appreciated. This online program, aimed at veterinarians and human physicians, will help to bridge this knowledge gap and its first ‘graduates’ are expected in September 2020. We thank One Health Committee Chair, Dr Michael Lappin, for overseeing the development of the program and to all those who have contributed to it.

New resources to support our members
2019 saw the creation of new tools and resources by our Clinical Committees; the further development of our existing Global Guidelines, new educational partnerships to support our members and the signing of memoranda of understanding with not-for-profit associations with whom we can work to accelerate progress in tackling global issues, such as rabies control and animal welfare.

Extending our global veterinary community
At the Toronto meeting, we were delighted to welcome six new associations into the WSAVA community, taking our total membership to 113 global associations, representing more than 200,000 companion animal veterinarians.
2020 – Our work goes on despite the pandemic

Nothing about 2020 has been normal but our work continues unabated. We have adopted new ways of engaging with and supporting our members and ensuring that we show global leadership on issues relating to the care of companion animals.

Responding to COVID-19
To address concerns regarding the zoonotic potential of SARS-CoV-2 and companion animals, our Scientific and One Health Committees have prepared regular communications for our members, partners, and other stakeholders, setting out the latest scientific evidence in this rapidly-evolving situation. WSAVA content has also been issued to the media, contributing to a dramatic increase in our media profile globally. We hosted a webinar in April, with the kind support of Purina Institute and Zoetis, which has been viewed more than 20,000 times. Developing and ensuring the accuracy of this content has been demanding for the Committees and for our volunteer translators, and I thank them for providing this extremely valuable service to all those with an interest in the impact of COVID-19 on companion animals and their carers.

Working to secure equal access to veterinary medicines
Another key initiative has been the WSAVA List of Essential Medicines for Cats and Dogs. Developed and published by our Therapeutics Guidelines Group (TGG), it addresses the difficulties faced by our veterinary colleagues in some parts of the world in accessing the vital veterinary medicines required for minimum standards of clinical practice. We believe the List of Essential Medicines will enhance the standard of care that companion animal veterinarians worldwide can offer, and also facilitate regulatory oversight of veterinary pharmaceuticals. We thank the TGG for its invaluable contribution to the veterinary profession and look forward to discussing the issues raised during our second Shaping the Future session during #WSAVA2020 in Poland in March 2021.

Launching our new Vaccination Guidelines for Practitioners in Latin America
Earlier this year, we were delighted to launch a set of regional Vaccination Guidelines to support companion animal veterinarians in Latin American countries. The culmination of a four-year project by our Vaccination Guidelines Group (VGG), they offer evidence-based recommendations for the vaccination of cats and dogs against the most prevalent infectious diseases in the region. We offer our thanks to the VGG team which has worked so hard to produce these Guidelines, kindly supported by MSD Animal Health. They will be of great value to our members in the region.

Looking ahead at new ways to support our members
WSAVA has a unique resource – the knowledge, range of expertise and experience of our global experts. Over the next few months, we will harness this knowledge base and expertise to deliver broad-ranging, WSAVA educational content in an extended range of online formats to our members. While we will of course, continue to deliver vital continuing education, this new approach will go further, enabling us to offer, in addition, engaging state-of-the-art thinking and leadership of value to all of our members - and to the wider global companion animal veterinary community, media and stakeholders. Stay tuned for more information on this initiative!

Meanwhile, while we cannot, at present, carry out face-to-face CE or lecture at global congresses, in addition to the activities listed above, our Committees are constantly developing new resources, tools and other online content. If you have not visited our redesigned website recently, please find time to explore the variety of information offered, including lectures from previous World Congresses in the WSAVA Academy.
In this difficult year, we suffered a very personal loss in May when our Honorary Treasurer Emeritus Professor Michael Day died, following an illness bravely borne. The WSAVA One Health Committee was created at Michael’s instigation and, under his stewardship, the Vaccination Guidelines Group produced world-first guidelines for companion animal practitioners. Michael’s contribution to WSAVA cannot be overstated and his memory will live on, not least through the service of his wife, Professor Mary Marcondes, a member of both the VGG and the Scientific Committee.

Finally, I must say some important thank-you’s – to my colleagues on the Executive Board, to our Committee Chairs and Members who all give their time so generously to support the growth and development of WSAVA and its members.

I would also like to thank our Industry Partners - the Purina Institute and MSD Animal Health, our Diamond Partners; our Gold Partner, Hill’s Pet Nutrition; our Silver Partner, Royal Canin; and Zoetis, which has recently come on board as a Bronze Partner. Our work is helping to transform companion animal practice around the world, but we really could not do it without your generous support.

Thank you.

It has been a privilege and an honour to serve as WSAVA President for the last two years. Despite the difficult times we are living through, our global community is pulling together for the sake of our members and the animals in a quite inspirational way.

Looking ahead, as the pandemic – we hope – subsides, we have much to look forward to, including #WSAVA2020, which will now take place in Warsaw next March; new faces joining our leadership team and committees; new Guidelines in development and our plans to extend our online activities.

I look forward to continuing to serve WSAVA and to support the new president through the challenging but exciting times ahead.

Dr Shane Ryan
WSAVA President