State of the Association: WSAVA in 2023

Dr. Ellen van Nierop (WSAVA President)

When I look back at the last year, I’m amazed at what the WSAVA has achieved in that time. I am also grateful to my predecessor, Dr. Siraya Chunekamrai, who successfully guided us through the many challenges of the COVID 19 pandemic, enabling me to start my presidential term at a time when we were (pretty much) back to a normal way of living and working. I also want to thank our current board; it is a pleasure to work with colleagues who are fully invested in all that WSAVA stands for and ready to put in the energy it takes to move forwards.

This year, it has felt as if our volunteers were especially driven in helping WSAVA reach her goals, and, as always, they gave generously of their time and energy resulting in a record number of committee output this year. Sometimes, in the past, I’ve have felt that the WSAVA is like an elephant – so big that it can take a while to get her going. But, once she does get moving, there is no stopping her – and, wow, this elephant has taken some big steps during 2023!

I would like to thank all of our volunteers and members for their hard work and constant support. Our new Secretariat team under the leadership of Richard Casey has also played a key role in enabling our progress this year. I am grateful to the team, and know that without their strategic thinking and subsequent hands-on approach we would not be getting as far as we have done.

So, let’s have a look at the highlights of this year:

Our new strategic plan

We started working on our new strategic plan at our board meeting in Lima last year, before asking for input from our extended leadership circle and our assembly members during the general assembly in Lima. Once we’d received that feedback, we circulated a new strategic plan for 2023-2025 in January of this year to all of our members. This plan, strengthened by your insights, is now rolling out slowly but surely.

To recap; the plan has five focus areas. They are:

- Setting standards
- Education and development for the veterinary team
- Campaigning for change
- Building community
- Enabling factors.

I’d like to share with you the progress we’ve made in each of these areas this year:

In terms of Setting standards, I’m proud to announce that this year’s Congress will see the launch of our updated Global Vaccination Guidelines, as well as our new Global Professional Wellness Guidelines; our Global Reproduction Control Guidelines and, from our One Health Committee, our Global Zoonoses Guidelines. What a fantastic achievement to have so many Guidelines to launch at once! Yet again, I must thank our committee members who have worked so very hard to create these vital resources. We are beyond grateful for the gift of their knowledge and time.
Now we must make sure all members of our community know about the Guidelines and start using them. Assembly Reps – this is your task!

Moving to **Education and development for the veterinary team**, again, we have good progress to report with highlights including an Africa-focused ‘gastro-intestinal basics’ webinar series, supported by our member association BSAVA. You will find this and other great webinars on the WSAVA Academy.

During Congress, we will be launching two new WSAVA Certificates – the first in **Pain Management** and the second in **Professional Development and Personal Wellness**. Both of these will be available, free of charge, on the WSAVA Academy.

Our 2023 Congress will also be the first to feature a full three-day stream on non-clinical topics. These days, while developing our clinical skills and knowledge remains as important as ever, we all know that skills in areas such as leadership, management, finance and teamwork are also essential for members of a profession that faces so many challenges.

Speaking of Congress, the way we organize our Congress and its format have not changed in many years and we believe they are in need of a refresh. There are a number of potentially exciting new directions we could take or models we could adopt so we will soon be asking for your input as we develop our thinking in this critical area. We want to ensure that our global veterinary community has an annual opportunity to reunite in person and that our Congress meets the needs of our members, while generating the income we require to support much of our work. We look forward to your ideas and suggestions to help us create a WSAVA Congress model for the 21st century.

In terms of **Campaigning for change**, thanks to the good relationships fostered by our past presidents, combined with the hard work of the Therapeutics Guidelines Group, the WSAVA was positioned as a prominent partner of World Organization for Animal Health (WOAH) during its General Session in May. We were given a stand and, while we were there, had many useful discussions about the importance of ensuring equitable access to veterinary medicines globally and the importance of including companion animals in discussions about antimicrobial resistance with government officials, regulators and other stakeholders. We are looking forward to continue to work with WOAH to raise awareness of the importance of companion animals in the One Health agenda. We also met with the World Veterinary Association this year to discuss ways to work together for a better future.
Our community is the reason we are here and we intend to continue to **Build our community** – so it is our fourth strategic goal. You will already have been involved in the consultations around our [strategic plan](#) and, more recently, around the need for changes to our [by-laws](#). We will be inviting your input more regularly as we go forward as we work to ensure that we continue to meet your needs. I should also mention that we held a regional Members Forum in Asia this year to strengthen our relationships with our members in the region and encourage open discussion and information sharing. Some interesting ideas resulted that you will be hearing about later today. We thank the Veterinary Practitioner Association of Thailand for its generosity in hosting us at its regional congress.

Reaching out and supporting colleagues in need also helps us to **Build our community**, whether that is due to natural or human disasters such as earthquakes or war, or due to chronic socio-economic challenges such as are happening in the countries that are requesting your permission to remain as associate members yet another year. It is heart-warming to know that some of our better-established associations can and do actively support some of our less fortunate members. This is what being a part of a global veterinary peers is really about.

To enable us to achieve our new Strategic Plan, a number of what we call **Enabling Factors** have had to be put in place. We had to change the by-laws in order to ensure a better standard of governance and give us more flexibility in today’s fast-changing world. We thank you for your contribution to these and for attending the special assembly meeting in July, at which they were formally accepted. Our next step is to create a manual of policies and procedures that define and simplify how the WSAVA works. Expect more on this next year.
Because of the importance and range of our continuing education (CE) offerings - everything from our Congress to online courses, webinars and face-to-face CE managed by our CE Committee and other clinical Committees, we recently took the decision to appoint our first Chief Learning and Development Officer. She is called Debbie Pearsall and we are delighted that she is here with us for Congress to start work. Debbie joins the Secretariat and it is her responsibility to oversee, strategize, develop, and streamline our CE offerings. She brings to us a great deal of relevant experience and we are delighted to welcome her to the WSAVA family.

Communication is also an Enabling Factor so we have sought the help of a specialist communications company to guide us through the process of modernizing our communications activities, including refreshing our website and updating our other communication tools. You will have a say in how you feel our communications should change and in the very near future, will receive a questionnaire on this. You will start to see some changes during the next year. We appreciate your constructive feedback at all times so please tell us what you think.

This address would not be complete without thanking one more very important group – our WSAVA Industry Partners. Without them we would not have the funding and support our committees need to enable them to create the tools and other resources that are helping to transform companion animal veterinary care worldwide. While they are a source of financial support, they are also deeply invested in our goals and genuine partners at a strategic level. I would like to thank:

Our Diamond Partner, the Purina Institute
Our Platinum Partners, MSD Animal Health and Zoetis
Our Gold Partner, Hill’s Pet Nutrition
Our Silver Partner, Royal Canin
And Our Bronze Partner, Virbac

I’d also like to welcome our new Bronze Partner, Elanco.

As 2023 comes to an end, there is still much to do but I can honestly say that this year we have laid some very firm foundations and that everything is now in place to enable us to press on quickly with our strategic plan in 2024. So, look out for yet more progress next year and, even better, why not find out how you can get more involved in one of the many projects that will help to take our global community forward?

Before I close, I would just like to thank all of our volunteers and member associations once more for your contribution to the WSAVA. We are a community built on collaboration and teamwork and this has been clearer than ever this year. It is an honor to be your President.

Enjoy the Lisbon 2023 Congress, and we look forward to seeing you again, if not before, then in Suzhou for our 2024 WSAVA World Congress!

Thank you.

Dr Ellen van Nierop
WSAVA President