

**RURAL VETERINARY PRACTICE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA
1964 to 2007**

A thesis submitted for the degree of

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by

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at any University.

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ABSTRACT

Concern for the plight of rural veterinary practice in Australia existed throughout the 20th century. During the 1970s, the profession highlighted the problems faced by rural practitioners and in 2003, the Frawley Review examined current rural veterinary services. However, neither influenced the course of rural practice in Australia.

The present thesis examined the status of rural practice in Western Australia from the 1960s to the present day. It did this by investigating the historical changes in agriculture during this period and their effect on rural practice. The practice at Katanning, in rural Western Australia, was used as a case study – a study of the changes and adaptations made by that practice to remain viable.

In 2006, surveys of both rural practitioners and government veterinary officers were conducted to obtain information of the veterinary services being provided to rural Western Australia. In addition, oral history interviews with a number of respondents to the surveys were carried out.

Rapid expansion of Western Australian agriculture took place during the 1960s and was matched by growth in rural veterinary services. A government subsidy scheme recruited a number of veterinarians to the state. A Preventive Medicine/Animal Production service with sheep was established at Katanning in 1967. The reasons for developing such a service, its promotion, the results achieved and its subsequent failure are documented in the thesis.

The 1970s was a troubled decade for agriculture and for those servicing it. The collapse of the beef-cattle boom was accompanied by a 20% reduction in veterinary staff in rural practice Australia-wide and a number of changes were implemented at Katanning to meet these circumstances.

The 1980s saw a reduction in the economic significance of agriculture in Western Australia. At the same time, students from the Veterinary School at Murdoch University began graduating and, for the first time in the profession's history, an overproduction of veterinarians existed.

The 1990s was a period of relative stability, but was accompanied by major changes for the profession and rural practice. Many practices adopted merchandising and the sale of pet foods to supplement dwindling income. Previously, a male dominated profession, during this decade, it rapidly changed to one dominated by female graduates. Accompanying this gender change there was an increase in the demand for part-time work, whereas previously the profession had been predominantly a full-time vocation.

The present decade opened with a questioning of the direction being taken by the profession and its undergraduate education. The current study revealed that the government veterinary services in Western Australia have contracted in size and scope, whilst at the same time, most rural practitioners attend companion animals at the expense of economic livestock. As a result, veterinary services to economic livestock have reduced and are likely to continue to do so and suggestions are made to counter this trend.

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COMMUNICATIONS

Some of the work reported in this thesis has been communicated in the following papers, reports and seminar proceedings:

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