

Vets in demand



Malaysia needs thousands more to plug shortage of experts in animal welfare, public health and food safety

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IN a country where pets are increasingly seen as family and livestock remains vital to the economy, the veterinarian's role is more crucial than ever.

From ensuring animal health to supporting public health efforts, veterinarians play a wide-ranging and meaningful role in society, said Medic Pro Link Sdn Bhd senior consultant Alex Partthiban.

According to Alex, veterinary medicine is about heart, care, and improving lives across species.

"You'll be making a difference not just in the lives of animals, but also in the health of communities and the safety of our food systems," he said, adding that in Malaysia, these skills are desperately in need.

"Veterinary medicine offers not only strong job prospects but also a fulfilling and rewarding career path – one that more students in Malaysia should consider.

"The reference to veterinarians as 'Doktor Lembu' (Cow Doctor) is a thing of the past," he said, adding that today, with advancements in technology and a growing global population, societies around the world are faced with numerous challenges – ranging from food supply chain management and disease control to even smuggling prevention.

"Veterinarians play a crucial role across all these fields, and their contributions are increasingly being acknowledged," he said.

Decades-long shortage

Alex also highlighted that Malaysia has long faced a shortage of veterinarians, with demand consistently outpacing supply.

"Malaysia only has two veterinary schools, compared to 32 medical schools for human medicine – 11 public and 21 private. Yet, the demand for vets keeps growing.

"Currently, Malaysia has approximately 2,300 registered veterinarians.

"According to international standards, we should have one vet for every 5,000 people, but in Malaysia, we have one for every 14,300 people," he said.

He added that to close this gap, the country would need at least 6,400 more veterinarians – a number that current local universities are far from meeting.



"We're only producing about 220 vets a year. At this rate, it will take us 30 years just to meet today's demand, assuming the population doesn't grow – which it will," he noted.

The shortage, he said, is made more dire by the rising number of pet owners and the country's reliance on animal-related industries including agriculture, food safety, and zoonotic disease control.

"Roughly 59% of Malaysians own pets, but we only have around 650 authorised vet clinics in the country. It is also easier for a vet to get a practising licence and start a career overseas," he said.

Opportunities abroad

Alex said securing a seat in local public universities can be highly competitive, due to the limited number of slots available and the high demand from a large pool of applicants.

However, he said, there are still opportunities to pursue veterinary studies in countries like Indonesia, which is home to top veterinary schools like Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) and IPB University.

"These institutions are fully recognised by the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), with UGM's veterinary degree approved as equivalent to that of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

"This makes it easier for Malaysian graduates to return and practise professionally after completing their degrees," he said.

Shedding more light, Zara Zakiah Education Sdn Bhd marketing manager Annawi Shamsudin said the two universities in Malaysia that offer veterinary programmes are UPM and Universiti Malaysia Kelantan (UMK).

"UPM, the main public university offering veterinary medicine locally, has only 150 seats available annually across all its majors, and UMK offers just 50 seats for veterinary medicine," he said.

He said Malaysian students should know that Indonesia is a practical and accessible destination to pursue the field.

He noted that while countries like Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand offer reputable veterinary programmes, the cost can be prohib-

itive – ranging between RM500,000 and RM700,000.

In contrast, he said, Indonesia presents a much more affordable option, with the total cost averaging around RM150,000 for a full veterinary degree.

"Bangladesh is even lower at around RM60,000, but Indonesia is often the preferred choice because of its proximity, familiar culture, and quality of education," he said, adding that more importantly, degrees from Indonesian universities like UGM and IPB are recognised by both the Malaysian Veterinary Council (MVC) and the MQA.

Brace for rigour

For aspiring veterinarians, understanding what lies ahead in their academic journey is important, said Alex.

"Veterinary medicine is a biology- and organic chemistry-heavy discipline.

"Students will need to have a strong grasp of subjects like anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, microbiology and pathology," he said.

He explained that whether students study locally or in Indonesia, the core subjects are largely the same.

In Indonesia, he said, veterinary studies are divided into three main phases: pre-clinical, para-clinical, and clinical and practical.

"The pre-clinical stage is where the groundwork is laid.

"This is followed by the para-clinical phase, which includes clinical pathology, radiology, diagnostic imaging, and clinical biochemistry," he said, adding that there will be more lab-based learning but limited direct contact with live animals.

"In the final phase, students undergo practical training through internships and field rotations, spending time in real veterinary settings.

"This is where they transition from theory to real-world application," he said.

Beyond academic ability, he stressed that students pursuing veterinary medicine must possess a genuine interest in animals, resilience, and a strong work ethic.

"Veterinary science isn't just about loving animals – it's also about science, discipline and practice," he said.

He urged students coming from the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia (STPM) or equivalent qualifications to be mentally prepared for the scientific rigour of the programme.

"If you're strong in biology or chemistry, and passionate about the field, veterinary medicine can be incredibly rewarding," he said.

He added that for students who are passionate about the medical field but seek a path with less psychological pressure from treating human patients, veterinary medicine offers a fulfilling alternative that lets them apply their love for life sciences and healing in a different yet

equally meaningful environment.

Bright prospects

Upon graduation, Alex said, Malaysian students can expect starting salaries of RM3,500 without their Animal Practising Licence (APC), and RM4,500 or more once licensed.

"Many clinics contact us directly to recruit graduates; the demand is that high," he said.

He also said the career path is broader than many expect.

"In addition to private clinics, veterinarians in Malaysia can work in government and regulatory agencies, academic and research institutions, meat and food safety inspection, livestock and animal health industries, animal welfare nonprofit organisations, and international organisations like the World Health Organization (WHO) or the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH).

"There are also emerging non-traditional fields like One Health – which integrates veterinary, medical, environmental and policy expertise," he said, adding that there are niche careers veterinarians can pursue such as wildlife crime investigation and even journalism.

"Veterinarians are on the front lines of identifying and controlling diseases that can jump from animals to humans," Alex added.

Meanwhile, Annawi said the veterinary field should be promoted to students not only as a career of compassion, but also as one of critical national importance. "We need to show young people that being a vet means being part of a larger system," he said, adding that Malaysia, as a country with significant agricultural and ecological diversity, urgently needs more veterinarians in roles that go far beyond companion animal care.

"Veterinarians can work in biosecurity, halal meat certification, vaccine development, and more.

"These are areas where the demand is rising – but where public awareness is still low," Annawi explained.

He also said that the key to attracting more students lies in reshaping the narrative.

"Let's move past the stereotype of the vet with a dog on the examination table.

"It's a powerful, multifaceted profession that intersects with science, ethics, law, and international development.

"Students who are curious and driven to make a difference in the world should take a serious look at veterinary medi-

cine," he said.

Note: The interviewees were exhibitors at the Star Education Fair 2025, which was held at IOI Grand Exhibition and Convention Centre, Putrajaya, from May 17 to 18. Among other exhibitors at the fair included Newcastle University, Universiti Tenaga Nasional (UNITEN), Universiti Kuala Lumpur (UniKL), Multimedia University (MMU), and Universiti Malaya (UM).

Shaping animal health heroes



Veterinary medicine in Malaysia is gradually gaining more recognition, especially as public awareness of

animal welfare, food safety, and zoonotic diseases increases. However, many still view veterinarians as simply "pet doctors", without fully appreciating their critical roles in research, public health and environmental conservation. To better promote veterinary medicine to young students, we need to start early – by integrating animal science and veterinary topics into science clubs and STEM programmes. Loving animals is a great start, but veterinary medicine demands much more – it's a science-based field that requires emotional resilience, and a genuine commitment to animal and public health. My advice is to see why you want to become a veterinarian. Is it just about caring for pets, or are you curious about biology and animal behaviour? Speak to current students or recent graduates so they can give you more insight. What's important is having the right mindset for a meaningful career.

GSC Global Solutions chief executive officer and founder Mohammed Shoaib Chy

Veterinary medicine often lags behind human health professions in terms of visibility, perceived prestige, and support. Some ways to improve its promotion among young students include early exposure in school, highlighting its career diversity, and mentorship and outreach programmes to guide and inspire aspiring veterinarians by providing real-life insights into the profession. Students considering this path should build a strong foundation in science, particularly in biology and chemistry, which is essential. It is also important to understand the emotional side of the profession, such as coping with animal loss, managing difficult decisions, and supporting clients through challenging situations.

Zara Zakiah Education Sdn Bhd marketing manager Annawi Shamsudin