First, let me state that I am proud to be a part of a profession filled with individuals who continue to place the welfare of their patients above nearly all else. When I look out at an audience of veterinary students or a group of practitioners, I can be pretty confident that most in the room chose their profession for the right reasons. If I ask such a group how many chose veterinary medicine for the money, the question brings a few chuckles but a hand never goes up. Still, although most of us chose to become veterinarians to help animals and the people who own them, we can only be truly successful in that endeavor if we take steps to ensure a long and sustainable career. The unfortunate individuals who leave the profession because they cannot make their pluses outweigh their minuses must surely feel unfulfilled in their noble aspirations.

Toward that end, practice management and efforts to improve the economic circumstances of veterinarians and the profession are as critical to veterinary medicine as new diagnostic techniques and treatment protocols. I was pleased that *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* was so supportive of a proposed issue devoted to practice management because I knew that its reader base represented practitioners with a sincere interest in continuing education and professional development. In almost all cases, good business is good medicine and vice versa.

The last issue of *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* dedicated to practice management was published in November 1983. I had actually submitted my draft table of contents to Elsevier before dredging up that issue from the library’s archives, but found it very interesting how pertinent some of the topics still are. An article on computers in veterinary practice management,
while discussing “floppy drives” and CRTs, accurately predicted the critical role these systems would have in well-managed practices of the future. Deferred compensation plans, pet health insurance, and marketing are still topics of interest and appear in the current issue, albeit, with the advantage of 22 years of evolution and hindsight.

Greater strides have been made in the area of veterinary practice management in the last 5 to 10 years than probably any other time span in our profession. The 1999 KPMG LLP report entitled “The Current and Future Market for Veterinarians and Veterinary Medical Services in the United States” is sometimes referred to as the “Mega Study,” presumably because of its depth, breadth, and bulk. Even after 6 years, the dust disturbed because of this landmark study has still not settled. Those who found fault or took issue with the conclusions made in the study will have to concede that, if nothing else, the KPMG study drew attention to the economic problems facing the profession and launched substantive efforts to improve our plight. Most of us in the profession would agree these efforts have been very successful by almost any metric.

I did not want this issue to pick up from where *Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice* left off in 1983, but rather to carry the ball set in motion by the KPMG study. The topics addressed herein begin with a broad overview of current economic trends citing the wealth of information now available to us. Other global issues addressed include a fresh perspective on the cause and effect of the gender shift, as well as current legal issues that impact us all. New associates burdened by significant student loan debt will find the article devoted to buying and selling practices of interest. Buying and leasing real estate for veterinary practice is an area of interest that has received little attention in the past. For current practice owners and administrators, articles on communication, marketing, hiring and retaining excellent employees, billing, third-party payment, and pet health insurance, as well as client compliance, will be pertinent. Practice owners considering a transition into retirement will be particularly interested in the articles on practice valuation and succession planning.

In assembling the team for this project, I had a good idea of which individuals were preeminent in these areas of expertise. I approached them with some trepidation, even the ones whom I knew well, recognizing how busy each of them must be. I had little compensation to offer, only the opportunity to reach a new venue of veterinarians with their critical messages. I was very pleased to discover that the consultants, academicians, and administrators featured herein proved to be every bit as altruistic in their commitment to improving veterinary medicine as the practitioners they serve.