

**0:00:00.0 Katie Berlin:** Hi, Omar Farias. Welcome. Thank you for coming by.

**0:00:03.8 Omar Farias:** Thank you so much, Katie. Thank you. I appreciate the invitation.

**0:00:06.8 Katie Berlin:** Omar, would you mind introducing yourself and letting people know who you are and why you're here?

**0:00:10.8 Omar Farias:** Yeah. Yeah, my pleasure. I am Dr. Omar Farias. My pronouns are He/Him/His. I work for Hill's Pet Nutrition. I'm the senior manager of Professional Partnerships and Events. I'm also a board member, PrideVMC. I am currently the president-elect for Pride Veterinary Medical Community.

**0:00:30.2 Katie Berlin:** Love that. So that was a very short bio for a very busy person. [laughter] I'm sure your everyday life, everything gets done and it's for a nutshell like that, and you have all this free time, right?

**0:00:41.5 Omar Farias:** Yeah, yeah. [laughter] Well, I can certainly tell you more. I'm from Puerto Rico. I was born and raised there. I graduated from University of Pennsylvania. So I am a VMD, which I always jokingly say that is Very Much in Debt. But I did actually finish paying my student loans about two years ago.

**0:00:58.2 Katie Berlin:** Awesome, congratulations.

**0:01:00.4 Omar Farias:** Yeah, thank you. Graduated in 2000, was in general practice for about 11 years. Now, I've joined Hill's in 2011 as a consulting veterinarian in New York City and moved through different roles at Hill's, and now I'm in the corporate office.

**0:01:13.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. So I think a lot of people have probably met you through your role at Hill's, but I was really excited to hear that you were now President-elect of PrideVMC. I'm a big fan of PrideVMC, and I think I was telling someone else this year. I was telling Cherice Roth this year that the PrideVMC, Facebook and Instagram feeds make me really happy because it's just like a bright light in my day usually, they're highlighting really cool people doing cool things, and they're encouraging and uplifting and sometimes talking about really hard stuff, but always in a beautiful, inclusive way. And I love that. And so I couldn't think of a better person to take over the role of President, which I hear now is not gonna happen for almost a year. [laughter] But they're very lucky to have you.

**0:02:00.7 Omar Farias:** Yeah. No, I'm lucky to be part of the organization, so thank you so much. So we're a big fan of you and AAHA. The posts, we have a fantastic CEO. Dr. Mia Cary is our CEO and she's really the machine that keeps us moving. I mean, I can't take credit for those posts. You know it is. Mia Sue, if you're listening, thank you so much. I also actually love the posts.

**0:02:24.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:02:25.9 Omar Farias:** They're my favorite part of my feed.

**0:02:27.1 Katie Berlin:** Yes. They fill you with life.

**0:02:29.1 Omar Farias:** They're inspirational. They also make me aware there's a lot of things that we can all learn culturally. And Mia does a really good job representing PrideVMC and just putting dates, or recognizing different subcultures. That I wouldn't even be aware of some of the issues that she puts on. So I learn a lot from our social channels myself, to be honest. So I'm with you. I love it. But it's not me, so I don't wanna take that credit.

**0:02:55.7 Katie Berlin:** Well, I think she does a great job representing the organization. And giving a tone to the PrideVMC voice, which is very identifiable. And I do think that there's a really special note that PrideVMC and the programs that they take part in and the Facebook Feed and just the way that social issues are brought to light by PrideVMC, I think is really unique in the veterinary world, because over the last couple of years, definitely we've all seen people kind of just like at each other's throats and it feels like you can't say the right thing or you can't ignore this issue, and you also can't focus on it because somebody will yell at you for the way you're focusing on it. And they're making it feel so complicated. And I feel like looking at those posts and hearing that tone of voice from a group like PrideVMC, it simplifies it for me. It makes it feel like it's not that hard and we just need to pay attention and be aware.

**0:04:02.6 Omar Farias:** Yeah. Thank you for that. I'll say, so we do also have a social media working group. So one of the nice things that we do is that anybody that is part of our Facebook group, that is a member of PrideVMC can bring up an issue or an article, and then as a group we decide whether that's also posted or not posted. We have a method in which we wanna make sure that we're vetting it, right? Making sure that it represents and has the right tone and the right voice. And then, if enough people give it a thumbs up and it doesn't bring any concerns or red flags, that is something we shouldn't post. So if people are also interested in participating, there's a way of connecting and kind of being part of that process, those people's articles are being posted to.

**0:04:44.7 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Awesome. That's good to know. That's a good policy too, 'cause then one person can't just be like, yeah, and then just post. [laughter]

**0:04:50.6 Omar Farias:** Yeah. Life is not an absolute, right?

**0:04:55.4 Katie Berlin:** Yeah.

**0:04:56.6 Omar Farias:** So as a group, we do better together and kind of understand what should be there.

**0:05:00.4 Katie Berlin:** I love that.

**0:05:01.0 Omar Farias:** And there's like the right context and somebody else may bring their perspective and pick up something that may be a red flag that I may be completely culturally unaware of.

**0:05:10.2 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, love it. So we're here at Connexity now, and the theme is Create a Better World. So I've been asking our guests, what does that mean to you? What does the better world in Vet Med look like?

**0:05:22.7 Omar Farias:** I love that question, and I love the theme of Connexity too this year of Creating a Better World. Really started strong with a keynote.

**0:05:33.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah, Just Pet It.

**0:05:34.5 Omar Farias:** Yeah. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, Just Pet It. I really enjoyed, the whole perspective of Hush is bringing that to life. From the Creating a Better World, from my perspective as a PrideVMC board member, obviously, our mission is just to create a better world for the LGBTQ+ community, a world in which we could all just be equal and thrive. One of the things that we're working on this year is, getting people to first of all bring awareness of the Gender Identity Bill of Right. And actually on acronyms, some of us call it GIBOR, some call it GIBR, so we're not really [laughter] a 100% there what acronym...

**0:06:14.7 Katie Berlin:** No, there's no right pronunciation.

**0:06:16.0 Omar Farias:** Yeah, that's right. But the Gender Identity Bill Of Rights is a document that was created by gender nonconforming, transgender non-binary individuals of our community that just really kind of outlines the basic human rights that those individuals should have and receive. So as part of our efforts of creating a better world, we're really kind of focusing on kind of bringing awareness of this document, and then we're inviting both individuals and organizations to actually sign the Gender Identity Bill Of Rights. So if people are interested in finding out more, they can go to [pridevmc.org](http://pridevmc.org). There's a little tab that is gonna talk about the Gender Identity Bill Of Rights. The big important thing for us is that we're gonna make sure that people actually read it and agree with it. And if they do agree with it, they can actually sign it and they can add themselves to it. Thank you, AAHA actually has signed, we're really kind of grateful for the support as an organization like yours that has put their name behind. And that's really significant just because you're leading. So that's really kind of like, from my perspective as a board member the one initiative that we're really doubling down and really want to talk to everybody just to make sure that we really protect those in our community that are most attacked, you know?

**0:07:42.8 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. That AAHA did just sign that, Garth signed it on our behalf, and I believe James, our CFO signed it also. And we had a meeting to when they signed it. So we all got together on Zoom, on Teams, and just watched him sign and talked about it, and everybody was misty-eyed and just like feeling their hearts were full, I think. And it is such a small thing to sign something and also such a big thing for it to mean so much coming from a very old organization that hasn't historically been seen as being like a thought leader in terms [chuckle] of being socially that liberal, I would say. And I love that so, so much. And it made me so proud to be part of AAHA. But it also made me feel really proud to be in the field where this is a really small industry and it's hard to be in a room at a conference like this and not know somebody now, you know? And people are starting to have these conversations with people they know and with people they don't know, and it feels like a more welcoming environment for them. Do you feel that too?

**0:09:02.3 Omar Farias:** Yeah, I do. And I'll say, so first of all I feel we're part of a great profession. I think that your typical veterinarian, veterinary technician, practice manager, the people that come to our profession are people that are just in general, just good people. They're in the profession to help animals. Just from the start, they're just good people. So I do feel that there's a difference in the profession, and I think that organizations like yours, AAHA, signing just really help because we can use you as an example, exactly what you just said, an organization that traditionally has been seen as potentially a little more conservative that wouldn't take a stand like that. And having AAHA sign just really helps. I actually have used you as an example, as I discuss

it with all organizations, why they should sign. And I say AAHA did, going back to being here in conferences and how it is a very small world, it is a very awesome community.

**0:10:07.5 Katie Berlin:** This'd better be nice.

[laughter]

**0:10:09.4 Omar Farias:** Yeah. [chuckle] I do love the fact that we're starting to have conversations that are very important. And I think that we're starting to move the needle of understanding how important representation is of understanding that, how we all benefit if we all support each other, kind of like better together ultimately. And that camaraderie, I do feel it at the conference and I do feel it here at Connexity.

**0:10:36.9 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Same. I've been saying this the whole week. Like, where have I been for the last few years? Not coming to Connexity. This is my first one and I really love it. I know. I'm not just here 'cause I have to be here [chuckle], so I just wanna put that on the record. But just being able to put pronouns on name tags and have that be normal. I love that. And just having things be more par for the course now, so that it doesn't have to be a discussion every time, that feels like progress to me.

**0:11:07.1 Omar Farias:** Yeah. Well, and that's impactful. And I noticed the pronouns immediately. Because I have been to a lot of events and there's an opportunity for more events to have the pronouns there. So as soon as I got my badge printed, I was like, woohoo. Like my pronouns are there, so that's perfect.

**0:11:26.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. Yeah, and I love it. So, okay, one more question.

**0:11:29.7 Omar Farias:** Yeah.

**0:11:31.3 Katie Berlin:** You work for one of the biggest companies around, it's really big, Hill's is really big. And we're an industry that spans a range from people like you who are a veterinarian who works for a very, very large international corporation. And then you have people who work at very tiny family-owned practices, and there seems to be more and more distance between them as time goes on, just because those little practices and the very, very big corporations have such different experiences day-to-day. But you're still a veterinarian, and the veterinarian at that tiny five person practice is still a veterinarian. What kinds of things do you feel like we can do to keep that common ground and remember that we are all in the veterinary community, even though our day-to-day might look really different? Like, do you have one thing that sort of you feel like unifies us more than just squishy puppies? [chuckle] Because it's always squishy puppies, you know.

**0:12:30.6 Omar Farias:** And kitties.

**0:12:31.9 Katie Berlin:** And kitties. Yes. And kitties, although they sometimes don't like being squished that much.

**0:12:35.3 Omar Farias:** Not squishy, but I mean, little kitties.

[chuckle]

**0:12:37.8 Katie Berlin:** But how can we keep that sense of community as companies get bigger, smaller practices struggle to keep up or they feel like maybe they're not being seen as much because of the presence of such large businesses in the industry?

**0:12:55.1 Omar Farias:** Yeah. So, I ultimately think that we have so many commonalities and like ultimately we're all human beings, right? So it's a little bit back to basics. It doesn't matter to me who you represent, or where you are, what company you're from. If I'm at any event where I sit on a table, actually I'll bring an example. The opening ceremony at Connexity, I came in, I sat at a table, there was a young lady that I didn't know, and I just sat, I'm not shy, so she was alone at the table. So I just sat there and I said, Hey, Do you mind if I sit with you? And then we started chitchatting. I learned she's from Minnesota, and she was like an hour and a half north of Minnesota. So it didn't really matter like that. I work for a company and she works at a small hospital. We were just people with each other, right? And then just had a conversation, and then we enjoyed the opening ceremony together and we left. So I think ultimately that's it. And from the perspective of the company, we visit everywhere. We visit all social sites of practices. So I feel that we try to have a sense of what's going on on different scales. It doesn't really matter like what type of like practice individuals are ultimately, but at the end of the day, we're all human beings. And I think that's the one common thing that we have. Just don't forget that we're just people and we have the same needs, the same wants, and different perspectives ultimately.

**0:14:30.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. And that's one of the reasons why these in-person events are so powerful. Like we sort of forgot that we needed them when we could get all our CE virtually, but there's nothing like coming here and sitting down at a table and meeting somebody new.

**0:14:42.5 Omar Farias:** Yeah. And for the record, I was never a huge fan of the virtual CE.

**0:14:46.3 Katie Berlin:** Oh, I didn't love it either. I mean, it's nice to be able to get it so that you don't have to go somewhere, but there's nothing like the energy of being at a conference. Yeah.

**0:14:58.1 Omar Farias:** Yeah.

**0:14:58.3 Katie Berlin:** I'm not shy either though, so that helps. [laughter] I was a really shy kid and people think that's really weird 'cause now they can't get me to shut up.

[laughter]

**0:15:05.5 Omar Farias:** Well, it's a good thing.

**0:15:06.6 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. [laughter]

**0:15:08.1 Omar Farias:** Yeah. We want you to find our voice. Yeah.

**0:15:11.4 Katie Berlin:** Yeah. That's true. And I think that's a really good way to wrap up because you are in your role at PrideVMC, you're a connection to the veterinary community and seeing so many different aspects of it, you're really helping a lot of people find their voice. So thank you for all that you're doing.

**0:15:26.6 Omar Farias:** I am just part of the organization, I don't take really any personal credit, I think that it is that sense of community and working with other diversity, equity, inclusion organizations that, all the umbrella organizations that we are. So it's just really all kind of working together and making it more powerful and better in community.

**0:15:43.8 Katie Berlin:** Love it.

**0:15:43.9 Omar Farias:** Thank you.

**0:15:44.9 Katie Berlin:** Thank you, Omar.