Veterinary Medicine – Final Year Professional Skills Week

The aim of the week is to consolidate and develop students’ insight into the functioning of a practice as a whole; to practise different roles and assess the contributions made by different team members to the welfare of clients, their animals and the practice.

**School:** Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies

**Target Audience:**Final year students

**Staff Involved:** Rachel Whittington, Gill McConnell, Catriona Bell, Ronnie Soutar, Aileen Brown and many other members of the Small Animal Hospital team

Key features

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The Learning Objectives are:

* develop the skills needed to foster client satisfaction;
* develop the skills needed to motivate and foster team satisfaction;
* develop the skills needed to be a good employee;
* recognise and respect informed consent and client confidentiality;
* recognise and practise accurate record-keeping, appropriate to the context;
* apply good judgement, according to ethical and social context, to clinical diagnosis and treatment;
* apply knowledge of legislation and the business needs of the practice of stock control, and the prescribing and labelling drugs;
* become familiar with and apply Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) in different areas of practice; and
* develop a broad overview of the financial constraints affecting practice.

The project aimed to prepare students to work within a small business, to broaden their understanding of how the business functions and how they can contribute to making it a successful practice. Historically veterinary curricula have focused entirely on developing good clinical skills.

Planning

3-4 initial meetings were held with the core group listed above. We used our recent practice veterinary experience and feedback from employers to decide the key areas to focus on over the week, and then held individual meetings with different members of the veterinary hospital team.

Event

Activities for the week: in groups of 5 final year students, there are three key components:

**1.**Tutorials will discuss the following areas:

* **Introduction to week**, the learning objectives and why they are important, details of the week’s activities and the assessment details.
* **Good client care**– how to keep clients happy and to ensure good communication
* **Practice finance**and how to talk about money
* **Pharmacy legislation**relevant to day 1 in practice
* **How to be a good employee**, interview techniques.

**2.**WebCT-based course providing core material, recommended reading and activities on:

* communication skills;
* personal development;
* welfare and ethics;
* business and personnel management; and
* legislation and best practice relating to the pharmacy.

**3.**Rotations working within the Hospital for Small Animals to help understand the perspectives of other members of a practice team. The professional studies students meet on the Friday morning to discuss the perspective they have experienced during their week with the rest of the group. They are expected to highlight the core issues and the impact this will have on working as part of a veterinary practice team in the future.

Each student is allocated one of the following perspectives to focus on:

* Pharmacy,
* Nursing,
* Reception,
* Finance, or
* Client.

Resources

Staff delivery time averaged approximately 7 hours per week for 32 weeks, plus contributions from reception, nursing and pharmacy staff within the veterinary hospitals.

Evaluation

Feedback was gathered from students after each rotation.

Feedback from students during first year when asked:-

'I believe the Professional Studies Rotation has been an important part of my veterinary training'

* 86% agreed or strongly agreed
* 7% neither agreed or disagreed
* 7% disagreed or strongly disagreed

So far we have only gathered feedback from students – benefits will only really be appreciated once they start work, so we need to gather feedback from recent graduates.

Many felt that they would have preferred to spend less time focussing on an individual veterinary team perspective but instead work through all areas, but this could not have worked with the current available staff resources. Some students asked that parts of this week were covered earlier in the curriculum.

**Benefits to Students**

* Now taught skills that most vets have had to learn by experience
* Given proven methods to manage clients and work colleagues
* Have a better understanding of financial pressures of practice, should reduce the discomfort vets feel when discussing fees
  + All three significantly reduce work stress
* Have training to add to their CV that employers see as valuable
* After the Professional Skills Week view the rest of final year from a different perspective, so even better prepared when start work.

Advice

* Needs close contact with recent graduates and employers
  + What skills are needed
  + What are vets finding stressful, can we do anything?
* Vet students need information to be directly vet related, even human medical examples not good enough!
* Sessions where students contribute work well for this type of training

Key contact

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<http://www.ed.ac.uk/employability/staff-information/how-employability-addressed/good-practice/mvm/final-year-professional-skil>