

Experiences of faculty mentorship of students in the job search and interview process

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Abstract

The method of veterinary education will vary slightly from university to university depending on location of the college and makeup of the veterinary student body. Understanding that there are differences can help you prepare to hire a new associate. You should also understand that your input at the college level can help guide some of the decisions with respect to content and methods of teaching veterinary students. This discussion will address experiences in teaching veterinary students at a few university colleges of veterinary medicine.

Key words: veterinary student training, student training, practice preparation

Introduction

Most veterinary students are wide eyed, excited, and ready to change the world when they reach veterinary school. As they move through the first semester and realize how much time they spend in the classroom, some of these students become mildly disenfranchised. As educators and mentors, we need to find ways to keep these students engaged and focused. This should start before the student reaches veterinary school. Mentors, high school guidance counselors, and colleges have a responsibility to ensure that the potential veterinary student understands the demands and costs associated with a veterinary education. It is important to keep them engaged and focused. It is important that veterinary students explore the different clubs, wet labs, and other opportunities to gain some hands-on experience and practical instruction. Most students remain more engaged when there are opportunities to touch animals. This may involve mentors from their home areas inviting the student to visit or help at the clinic during vacations and holidays. Many practitioners have declared that mentoring multiple students from your practice area may gain you a single veterinary associate in the future. This is a large commitment for a practitioner that is already stretched for time. Colleges of veterinary medicine are attempting to create a practice-ready veterinarian over a 4-year program. This becomes more difficult each year as the amount of knowledge required by a new graduate increases. There are numerous ways that colleges are attempting to deal

with this problem; this talk will focus on preparing a student to be a food animal practitioner.

It is important that veterinary colleges match instructors to particular areas of teaching. For example, a faculty member teaching in a food animal ambulatory setting should have some food animal ambulatory experience. In many cases, instructors with practice experience and teaching expertise are difficult to find. The Department of Veterinary Diagnostics and Production Animal Medicine (VDPAM) at Iowa State University places an emphasis on hiring and developing faculty members with practice experience. This is true at every level within the department, from diagnostic laboratory faculty to food animal and camelid hospital clinicians.

Each college of veterinary medicine uses slightly different methods to prepare students for veterinary practice. The Caribbean schools have students touching animals from the start. Saint George's University in Grenada, for example, has a series of physical exam laboratories for all students during the first semester where students learn how to perform basic techniques on various species. During 1 such laboratory, physical exam, placing an oral speculum, rectal palpation, and vaccination of the bovine are taught. Many veterinary colleges in the United States rely upon veterinary clubs and the students themselves to find these hands-on experiences during the first 2 to 3 years of veterinary school.

Most hands-on veterinary experiences occur during the fourth year of veterinary school when the students participate in clinical rotations; some schools begin clinical rotations sooner. Clinical training is divided into blocks or rotations that are typically 1 to 4 weeks in length. Clinical rotations are made up of a mix of mandatory and elective rotations available to the student. Some schools have more extensive externship programs available to students which allow them to spend time at a veterinary practice to gain experience in "real world" situations. AABP realizes the importance of the student externship experience and the AABP Task Force on Education is working to develop guidelines and participation lists for students and practitioners. The Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine VDPAM department has an externship/preceptorship program that allows students to pick a practice, make an agreement with the practice, and submit an application for the experience. Course instructor approval is based on the experience that is presented in the application, not the clinic. Students are required to log cases

or farm calls daily, students are required to submit a case report to the course instructor, and finally students meet with the course instructor to discuss the case report and the experience. Students evaluate the experience and host clinics provide an evaluation of the student. Students report a variety of experiences based on expectations, time of year, and practice selected. Sometimes 2 or more students will perform an externship at the same practice, at different times, and report vastly different experiences. An argument can be made that poor experience is still a good learning experience. As with everything else that is taught to the veterinary student, presentation of the material is very important. If a student returns from an externship and in their opinion it was a poor experience, the faculty member needs to figure out why the student feels that way and direct the conversation toward what the student took away from the experience that will guide them when they become an associate veterinarian. Externships should assist the student clinically but also assist in their development of communication and business skills.

Colleges of veterinary medicine and faculty appreciate feedback from practitioners. VDPAM at Iowa State uses an advisory board made up of practitioners, faculty, and industry that meets annually or biannually to discuss all aspects of the department. The board-provided feedback assists in the development of educational programs and teaching strategies, among other things. Ohio State's Department of Preventive Medicine developed a similar board in 2014. Practitioner feedback is invaluable to faculty as they prepare students. Practitioners continuously comment on 2 areas of concern: clinical skills and billing. Many students do not understand the importance of the basic veterinary skills such as the physical exam. Many times, this is the fault of the faculty and mentors and how this importance is presented to the student. No student should leave the Iowa State Food Animal Field Services rotation without being able to perform a complete physical exam. Every student on this rotation will spend time at the Iowa State Dairy Farm where Iowa State Veterinary Field Services performs a physical exam, diagnoses problems, and prescribes treatments on every animal flagged by farm staff. During orientation for this rotation, it is explained that this is the perfect time to hone their physical exam and observation skills. It doesn't matter the species, a physical exam system should be developed to prevent items from being overlooked. Students on this rotation are told the complaint,

students then perform the physical exam, make a diagnosis, and develop a treatment plan. This plan is discussed with the faculty clinician and implemented. This routine also allows the students to follow most cases to resolution. Students enjoy this system because it allows them to start making decisions and the faculty guidance and mentorship allows validation of the case. In 2016 Iowa State Veterinary Field Services purchased new practice software that uses Microsoft Surface Pro tablets. The students are introduced to the tablet and software during orientation. During the rotation students are responsible for entering medical records and billing for all farm calls. The records and billing are reviewed by the clinician and discrepancies are discussed with the student(s).

Many colleges are developing clinical skills labs to allow students to practice procedures on animal models. These labs are important to veterinary colleges for many reasons. There is pressure to reduce the use of live animals for instruction of veterinary students. Many of the models are very good, but they are not a total replacement for live animal work. The models have great value in teaching procedures, such as rectal palpation, calf repositioning during dystocia, and correct placement of obstetrical chains. There is a need for more and varied types of models. Models can be extremely beneficial in review of a case or in teaching a procedure for the first time. A castration model is under development at Iowa State that will be used for hands-on instruction of students prior to performing the procedure in the field for the first time. Most bovine castration is performed in the fall, and this type of model is also useful to give hands-on opportunities to students that are on a rotation during winter or mid-summer.

Conclusion

There are many opportunities for mentoring future food animal practitioners. Mentoring needs to start early and be complete. Students need to understand the medicine, surgery, business, and communication involved in veterinary practice. Students also need to understand the financial implications of college followed by 4 years of veterinary school. Mentorship and education of veterinary students requires the partnership of the colleges, faculty, practitioners, and organizations such as AABP.