

Student expectations for their first veterinary job

Troy A. Brick, DVM, MS

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Des Moines, IA; Troy.Brick@iowaagriculture.gov
Affiliate Assistant Professor, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Ames, IA

Abstract

Veterinary practice owners have a list of requirements, qualities, and needs they are looking for in a new associate. New graduates have the same type of list and it is important to consider the wants and needs of the new graduate that you are targeting for the practice's open position. There is data being prepared that examines what is most important to the new graduate as they begin to search for their first veterinary job after graduation.

Key words: job expectations, employment, veterinary employment

Introduction

Surveys conducted at Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine have discovered that students are most concerned with mentorship upon graduation. Students understand that their veterinary education gave them a large amount of knowledge; they also understand that there is still much more to learn as they enter veterinary practice for the first time. For many of these new graduates, the first job after veterinary school will be their first real full-time position. Many new veterinarians claim that this period is more stressful to them than any exam they have ever taken. Dr. Dan Grooms, Dean of the Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, hired students over the summer of 2019 to perform a survey of recent graduates from the Iowa State College of Veterinary Medicine. This survey has not yet been published but findings have been helpful in bringing potential employers and new veterinary graduates together. The information was also used to aid in the passage of the Iowa Rural Veterinarian Loan Repayment Program legislation that passed the Iowa Legislature in 2020 and was signed into law by Governor Kim Reynolds. This legislation is modeled on the United States Veterinarian Loan Repayment Act and will assist veterinary students with student loan debt when they choose to practice in an underserved area within the state of Iowa.

An informal survey of fourth-year veterinary students on the last day of their Iowa State University Veterinary Field Services rotation, mirrors the finding of Dr. Grooms' survey. Dr. Grooms' survey found eight items that are important to new graduates. The Field Services survey asked for the top three items that students were looking for in their first veterinary position following graduation. This generation of graduating veterinary students ranks mentoring as the number one quality they seek in their first job. Mentoring, salary, and practice culture were the top 3 items in both

surveys. The potential of ownership/partnership in a practice was last on the list of important items. This shows that new veterinarians want an environment that will continue to build upon their veterinary education. Today's students understand that veterinary medicine requires lifelong learning. They have also come to the realization that salary is important if they want to have a good quality of life and pay off their high student loan debt. Examination of the top answers of both surveys reveals that happiness in personal and professional life is very important to the new generation of veterinary practitioners. Older generations of veterinarians came to understand that satisfaction at work translates to a happier life away from the office. New graduates are entering practice with this knowledge. The Grooms' survey found that most new graduates expected to work between forty and fifty-five hours per week upon graduation. A slightly smaller group of participants expected to work between fifty-six and seventy hours per week. When mixed animal or food animal practitioners were asked their preference, an overwhelming majority stated that they preferred to work in a clinic that employed two to four other veterinarians. In conversations with students, it has come out that more veterinarians will allow for more and varied mentorship as well as less time spent on emergency duty.

The Grooms survey found that the majority of respondents expected salaries between \$75,000.00 and \$99,000.00 per year.

Conclusion

Over the last two to three years, there have been a large number of job opportunities for new graduates, allowing students the opportunity to be selective. Practice owners need to start their search for a new associate early, maybe up to a year or two in advance. Practitioners should identify potential future veterinarians in their practice area and begin mentoring early through part-time employment, summer jobs or internships, and job shadowing. Practice owners need to be prepared to explain their plan for mentoring new associates. During the interview process, practitioners need to highlight the community and opportunities for community involvement, jobs for significant others, and show a positive work environment and culture.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Dan Grooms and his summer scholar students (Kelsey Deaver & Laura Pelzel) for allowing me access to data from their survey.