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Why vets are great

By Max Foreman (4th Year, Cambridge)

For me, the answer to the question 'Why did you choose to be a vet and not a medic?' is easy. I find that a cold stare, a slight frown and an utterance of 'I just don't care about people' works a treat (NB: This is not a good way to make friends). However, I imagine the answer to the age-old vet versus medic question may not be as simple for everyone. For this reason, I thought I would share my recent thoughts about why vets are great, and why I believe we have definitely chosen the right profession.

From time to time I enjoy going out, having a drink and a wiggle. More often than not, I am joined by my fellow vets-in-the-making – young professionals who love letting their hair down. Some of my peers also pursue sport to the highest level, run university societies, or become heavily involved in charity work. We have gained a reputation for being superhuman: effortlessly juggling our interests with our studies, and doing none of it halfheartedly. It's something that we're going to need to do for the rest of our lives, and I'm proud to see us mastering it already.

The other thing that makes us the envy of other students are the opportunities that are open to us. How often do you hear of your English student counterparts spending their summer cuddling lion cubs in Africa? Or going on heavily subsidised exchanges abroad, such as those that are available to us through IVSA? Although we are a small group of students, we have the opportunity do phenomenal things. No other national group of students has anything like our Sports Weekend, nor do they have such great networking facilities. The stuff is there for us to do, we just have to choose to do it.

It is exciting to think about the role of the vet in the future. The majority of emerging infectious diseases of human importance come from animals. Animal welfare has never been as important and, with a growing human population, farming systems have to become ever more efficient. The vet plays, and will play, an increasingly important part in all of these issues. So, what should we do? Grab every opportunity. Come to AVS Congress to widen your education. Don't say no to getting involved in that sports team. Go to India in the summer to do EMS; and maybe take a more delicate approach when asked 'Why did you choose to be a vet and not a medic?' – perhaps something like 'Because vets are the best' might go down slightly better.



Max Foreman
javseditor@hotmail.com

Congratulations to Hannah Thomas who wins £20 for the best article by a first-year vet student (see page 16)



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IVSA exchange: Nottingham welcomes Austrian vet students

By Vicky Carliell (2nd Year, Nottingham)

In February 2012, 11 Austrian vet students arrived in the UK for the first part of an exchange trip between the vet schools of Nottingham and Vienna. In March, the Nottingham students returned the visit and spent five action-packed days in the city.

Part 1: Nottingham

After welcoming our Austrian guests and getting them settled with their host students, we kicked off the exchange with a night out in one of Nottingham's clubs. Our guests impressively shook off any travel tiredness and we had great fun dancing the night away.

We soon learned that there's no time for sleeping on an exchange, as we were up early the next day for a welcome breakfast with the Dean and other lecturers. This was followed by a tour of the vet school and some practical classes, where our guests got hands-on experience of ultrasound, radiography set-up, suturing, and also handling some of

the exotic animals in the vet school's smallholding. It was interesting to hear what our guests thought of our course and how it differed from the Austrian system. Comparing being a vet student in different countries is one of the great things about the exchange, as it lets you look at your own course from a new perspective.

Day 3 began with a tour of the university's dairy centre, including the state of the art robotic milking machine. In the afternoon, we visited nearby Wollaton Hall – a beautiful deer park and stately home, which houses Nottingham's Natural History Museum. The evening was spent showing our guests the best of British culture: fish and chips, Pimms and scones. In return, the Austrians introduced us to Manner chocolate and zirbenschnapps, and we even managed to swap drinking songs – prost!

Saturday was spent exploring Nottingham city, where highlights included taking photos in front of Robin Hood's statue, a pint of ale at England's oldest pub, and visiting Primark (which our Austrian friends had never seen, but abso-



lutely loved!). All too soon our last day arrived, and after a walk along the canals and traditional English roast lunch, we waved goodbye to our guests, already looking forward to our visit to Austria.

Part 2: Vienna

We didn't have long to wait; six weeks later the Nottingham students were on a plane bound for Vienna, joined by vet students from Bristol and Serbia. We quickly experienced what fantastic hosts our Austrian friends were, as Cassandra and her team of helpers cooked a traditional dinner of stroganoff, followed by Kaiserschmarrn (bite-sized fluffy pancake pieces) – the first of many delicious Austrian meals. We celebrated our reunion by heading into the city to experience Vienna's nightlife with which we became familiar over the next few days!

Day 2 began with a tour of Vienna's vet school, which, like Nottingham, is on a separate campus on the outskirts of the city, and we were impressed with its facilities and size. We were also jealous of all the animals they had on site, and of that the students were allowed to bring their pets to university and even to keep them in their halls of



residence. Later in the week we had a CPR workshop, and were treated to a lecture by anatomy legend Professor König.

We got a warm welcome from Intervet Austria; they gave us a tour of their production and packing facilities as well as a talk on being a veterinarian in the pharmaceutical industry. It was great to get this insight into one of the different roles of a vet, and something that most of us would not have otherwise got the chance to experience.

We loved seeing the sights of Vienna; it is a beautiful city with stunning buildings. During our stay we spent an afternoon in Tiergarten Schönbrunn (the oldest zoo in the world), visited the Spanish Riding School (home of the iconic Lipizzaner horses), took a stroll along the banks of the river Danube, and ate vast amounts of delicious waf-

fles and sacher torte. We also took a ride on the Heurigen Express – a land-train that took us up into the hills and vineyards surrounding Vienna, where we got to sample the local beer and wine.

To finish our exchange the Austrians threw us a fantastic farewell party in the campus bar. It was the perfect ending to what had been an amazing exchange, full of cultural and educational experiences, and new friendships. We were sad to say goodbye, and made plans to meet again – I'm sure it won't be long!



Getting to grips with reptiles at Nottingham vet school's smallholding

■ IVSA Nottingham would like to thank all our friends at IVSA Austria for being wonderful hosts, and to thank Nottingham Vet School and VetSoc for their support in making the exchange possible.

The Code of Professional Conduct – what's it all about?

By the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

As a vet student, you have a lot to get your head around, and we're pretty sure that the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons is not at the top of your list when it comes to studying and revising.

As future vets, though, it's important to understand what it means to be a professional – and the Code is a good place to start.

It's short – just 16 pages – but the Code is where the RCVS sets out the standards that are expected of veterinary surgeons, along with links to supporting guidance on topics ranging from certification to continuing professional development (CPD). It also contains the famous declaration (not actually an 'oath') that all vets – and now veterinary nurses – make upon registering.

Until April this year, these expectations were set out in the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct, which the Code was brought in to update and replace, and which you might still hear people refer to. It's more than just a change of name, though. For example, CPD is now explicitly stated as an obligation for all vets. As students, the study skills you are developing now can stand you in good stead after graduation, when you'll need to plan, record and evaluate your own professional development regularly.

Online log

From next year, you will be able to use the (free) online Student Experience Log, which forms part of the RCVS Professional Development Record (PDR) to help you record your practical and clinical experience while you are a student. Once you've graduated, the first step in



your CPD will be to follow the Professional Development Phase (PDP), and use the PDP component of the PDR – recording and reflecting on how you are developing your clinical competence to meet RCVS 'Year 1 competences'. There is a separate section in your PDR specifically tailored for this, as well as an online CPD recording tool for any additional studying you might do.

Although a hard copy of the Code will be given to you during your final or penultimate year (depending on your university), both the Code and the supporting guidance are on the RCVS website (www.rcvs.org.uk/vetcode). Why not have a look?

Vet Helpline broadens its reach

The Vet Helpline (VHL) celebrated its 20th birthday this summer. As one of its founders, David Wishart, says, 'It is hard to believe that VHL started with a telephone and an answerphone in a cupboard at the RCVS'.

The Vet Helpline service was first established in 1992 after two years of lengthy discussions driven by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) working in partnership with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), the British Veterinary Association (BVA) and the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF). David Wishart (BVA President, 1990/91) remembers: 'The Vet Helpline gestation was lengthy, we had no idea what work, costs and logistics were involved in running a helpline . . . the BVA and the RCVS were very supportive of the initiative'.

Volunteer helpers for the helpline were recruited, as they still are today, from the veterinary profession. They include veterinary surgeons (and some spouses) located throughout the UK from practice, government service, industry and academia. One of the current team of helpers who has been with the service since 1995, explains why she wanted to be on the team: 'Hearing an impressive interview with Lydia Brown (who currently chairs VBF) spurred me into thinking it was a way I could put something back into the profession. I was realising at the time that life in general practice was not without its difficulties; working alongside others in Vet Helpline has been surprisingly therapeutic.'

The helpline was initially established to provide support for veterinary surgeons and their families, but this has now been extended to veterinary nurses and veterinary students, some of whom want anonymity from their university support systems. Jill Nute (SPVS president,

1991) who was one of the initial team which established the helpline, commented: 'Vet Helpline was not set up to specifically try to prevent vet suicides; people wanted advice or help on a wide range of problems, and in those early days communication and employment were probably way out in front of health and wellbeing issues'.

Caller and helper anonymity is essential for Vet Helpline to function. Every year since the first meeting of the 24 volunteer helpers in October 1991, the helpers have met again at the BVA's headquarters to receive training and exchange ideas. This ensures that they can offer as high a level of empathetic support for emotional, addictive or financial problems as possible, and are able to refer callers on for specialist advice where appropriate. Detailed statistics about the calls are reported each year in the VBF's Annual Report, which is available to view on the Vetlife website (www.vetlife.org.uk).

Vet Helpline merged with the other veterinary support services run by the VBF in 1995. The original plan for a simple telephone advice and support service has grown into a service which, in many ways, is now the hub of the VBF support network. It is a 24-hour service that is available every day of the year, even Christmas day. Callers dial 07659 811 118 and are put through to an answer machine, where they can leave their contact details. Their call will be returned shortly afterwards by one of the helpers, all of whom have substantial experience of the veterinary profession and who will support callers in exploring the options that are open to them, and give them a safe space to think things through.

John Moffitt, one of the VBF directors with responsibility for Vet



Helpline, says: 'Our service is totally independent and confidential. We help veterinary callers of all ages with a variety of different issues. We are deeply indebted to the RCVS Trust for the financial grants it provides to the helpline, which benefit so many vets in need.'

The next innovation is to launch an e-mail response service later this year, which should enable those people who hesitate to contact the service by telephone to come forward to ask for help. Studies have shown that many people who are reluctant to use the telephone – possibly because they cannot talk in private – may make e-mail contact instead. The VBF wants to offer help in as many ways as possible. Rosie Allister, Vet Helpline chair, says: 'We know that vets can, for a variety of reasons, find it very difficult to ask for help when they are struggling. They may feel their problems aren't severe enough, or have very high expectations of themselves and think they should be able to cope with problems alone. Vet Helpline exists to offer support to individuals who are struggling and offers a completely confidential, non-judgemental space for people to think things through. We'd strongly encourage vets, vet nurses and vet students to get in touch if they need to talk.'

We hope the next 20 years will continue with the same positive progress for Vet Helpline.

From RVC to RAC: trading vets for agrics

By Grace Simmonds (3rd Year, London)

Having decided rather late (a week before the deadline) that it would be a good idea to intercalate and learn about farming, I entered into a series of e-mails with the Royal Agricultural College (RAC), Cirencester. I had always had an interest in livestock and, not coming from a farming background, I decided it would be a good idea to learn a bit about farm business and management. I'm also a strong believer in a holistic approach to veterinary medicine and agriculture. Being just down the road from home, the RAC, with its reputation for excellence – among other stories I had heard – was an obvious choice.

The RAC had not had a vet student intercalate onto its agriculture programme before and so I was given a fairly free choice of what modules to do. Between us we decided on farm enterprise management, farm business management, world agriculture, sustainable agriculture, farm business diversification, advanced animal production and a dissertation. As well as learning a lot about general farm management, I learnt business and communication skills that will be directly applicable to everyday veterinary practice.

The RAC was very welcoming. My overwhelming impression was that everyone was friendly and the staff wanted the students to be happy and have fun... as well as doing a little work! I was a slightly taken aback by the timetable (I was told it would be full). I suddenly appreciated how many hours a vet student does! I



Grace's dissertation involved an investigation of sheep breeding

also got the opportunity to try polo, a sport I'd always wanted to try, having ridden for many years. As well as having more fun than in any other riding discipline I've tried, I met a great group of people who soon became my friends. Actually, by the end of a year at the RAC you pretty much know everyone – helped by its size and there being so few places to go out in Cirencester. Being a small town uni, the student union is great, organising events most days of the week. I'm hoping I've picked up a lot of ideas I can take back to Royal Veterinary College for Rag week and other occasions.

The lecturers were all experts in their field, and very helpful. If anyone is interested in horses, I recommend reading Andrew Hemming's papers on the neurological pathways involved in stereotypies

One of the great things about the study programme was the number of visits timetabled. I went on at least one visit a week, including the college farms, Reading Dairy Research Centre and a trout farm with many diversifications. These experiences culminated in being given the

opportunity to go on an optional study tour to Yorkshire. Three lecturers took about a dozen students for five days, with a packed programme of visits to a deer farm, an estate, an abattoir, a small scale dairy, a feed merchants, a rape seed oil factory and, of course, a comprehensive tour of Yorkshire's public houses!

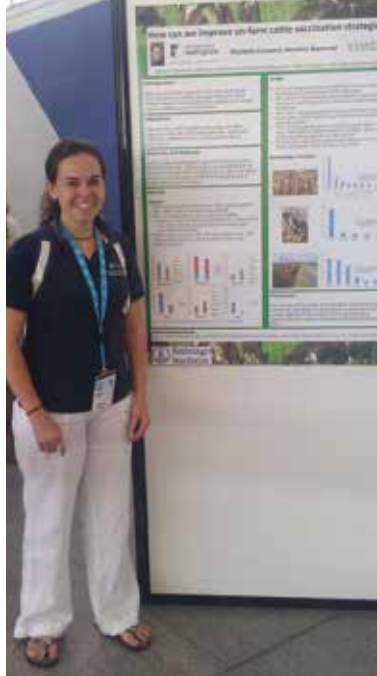
Completing my dissertation was a great experience. Having spent a week at the South West Sheep Breeding Centre over the summer I chose to work with Innovis (a sheep breeding service based in Malvern) to investigate whether the physical characteristics of rams affect the quantity and quality of their semen and its freezability. This gave me some brilliant contacts for future EMS and work, as well as being a fascinating project. On that note, networking was one of the best opportunities that the RAC presented me with, not only with staff but also its extensive alumni network.

I would recommend to anyone with an interest in farm animal practice taking an intercalation in agriculture, and the RAC is a fantastic place to study.

Reaching out with research

By Elizabeth Cresswell (4th year, Nottingham)

At some point in your vet school career you are likely to be asked to do a research project and, love it or hate it, it will become your life for a while. Having finished my research project in December, I received an e-mail from my supervisor in January saying that my abstract had been accepted for the 27th World Buiatrics Congress in Lisbon, Portugal. So, at the beginning of June I found myself boarding a plane to Portugal, armed with my poster tube. I was off to my first academic conference.



Elizabeth presents her research

The World Buiatrics Conference (WBC) is a four-day biennial conference that brings together current research in bovine science and practice. It offered a packed programme of talks, workshops and poster presentations throughout the event. Much of my week was spent listening to speakers presenting their research. It was a novelty to be able to choose the lectures I went to; and not have to worry about learning objectives and exams, but just to learn for the sake of my own interest.

On the Tuesday I was excited to be presenting my poster from my own research project, entitled 'How can we improve on-farm cattle vaccination strategies?'.

My research

My research consisted of a questionnaire-based survey, which had necessitated my attending lots of different farming and veterinary events such as shows and farmer talks to hand out my questionnaire. I was investigating which vaccines farmers were using on their farms and, more importantly, how and why they were

using them, because there is little point in selling vaccines if they are not being used effectively to control disease. From the results, we were

able to highlight areas of weakness in current vaccination strategies and suggest potential areas for improvement. These include ensuring that vaccines and subsequent boosters are administered at the correct time, and carefully selecting animals for vaccination.

I also looked at how farmers preferred to receive information about vaccination strategies, from which I discovered that face-to-face communication with a vet was overwhelmingly preferred as the main source of advice.

The opportunity to present my own work at the conference was very satisfying. My research suddenly meant more than a module mark for the vet course, but was information that I could discuss with vets and academics that could be taken forward and used to improve vaccination strategies on farms in the real world.

One of the best things about these types of events is that everybody is really keen and enthusiastic. I met a wide variety of interesting people who were carrying out all sorts of work – from studies that had been ongoing for years, to novel ideas such as using sniffer dogs to detect oestrus in dairy cows!

Of course, the socialising didn't stop in the conference centre, and the evenings were spent getting a taste of the food, drink and entertainment that Lisbon had to offer.

All in all it was a fantastic experience, and I would highly recommend students to attend similar conferences, especially if they can present their own work.

Special thanks go to my supervisor, Wendela Wapenaar, who submitted my abstract to the WBC. Thanks also go to XLVets, Boehringer-Ingelheim Vetmedica and Pfizer Animal Health, who provided the sponsorship that enabled me to attend the conference.



Joining the BVA – what's in it for me?

Over the past few weeks, the BVA has visited the UK vet schools – with the support of AVS reps – to encourage first year students to join the BVA and take advantage of one-year's free membership.

During many of the vet school visits, students from other years have found their way to the Association's stand, lured by the promise of freebies, and invariably have one of two comments to make: either, 'I haven't signed up yet', or 'I signed up but I don't get the journals any more?'

If you're in the first category and don't yet have BVA student membership, here's what you're missing out on:

- Free EMS insurance;
- BVA journals (*Veterinary Record* and *In Practice*);
- Access to online resources, and much more.

Membership renewal time is upon us, and the good news for students in the second year and above is that although membership may not be free (rates vary by vet school, as some universities subsidise students' BVA membership), the standard student membership rate is £36 per year, compared with £270, which is the standard BVA member rate.

If you are a BVA member, you need to make sure you make the most of your membership. All too often students sign up on the day, but don't update their contact details when they move. Updating your details is easy, and can be done either by visiting the BVA's website, www.bva.co.uk/member, or contacting the membership team on 020 7908 6350.

BVA members are encouraged to contribute to the latest discussion on the BVA community (www.bva.co.uk/community), and listen to the Association's series of free webinars on current contentious issues, available through The Webinar Vet.

These, and numerous other benefits, are available for you to access and will keep you updated with the latest developments in the veterinary profession, the profession you are working so hard to be a part of.

Want to get more involved?

The BVA, through the AVS, represents the student voice and both associations work closely to campaign on your behalf on issues that are important to you. The results of the recent BVA/AVS survey shows that there's still much to be done and we would welcome any involvement from student members in bringing about much-needed change.

Have your say and get your voice heard by initiating and contributing

to discussions on the BVA community or responding to specific consultations.

Final-year students


Student BVA members in their final year of study have access to even more benefits, including being a part of the Young Vet Network. You will receive a copy of the 'BVA New Graduate Guide' when you next renew your membership (at least you will if your details on our system are up to date). This guide has more than 120 pages of support and information to help with those first steps outside university, including career options, dealing with consultations, complaints, emergencies and advice from other new and recent graduates.

Resources

The BVA also has great resources to help you find a job. This year you can take advantage of the BVA Careers Fair which is taking place at the London Vet Show on November 15 and 16, and features two full days of seminars and one-to-one sessions offering support and advice around your veterinary career.

Current BVA student members can apply for a BVA scholarship to attend the LVS and the Careers Fair for just £53.55 plus VAT.

BVA student membership is what you make of it.



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AVS Congress, Edinburgh 2013: The Dick Vet's got Congress

By AVS Congress 2013 Committee

This year it's Edinburgh's turn to host AVS Congress and we're planning to try out a brand new format that includes an extra day of lectures and practicals (making it even better value for money) at Edinburgh's brand new teaching facility at the Easter Bush Campus.

This year's AVS Congress theme is 'Hands on vets', and we're aiming to present a practical event with an emphasis on the skills you will need in your future career. To add to the new format of congress, we're also introducing separate streams with the help of the Edinburgh Farm Animal Veterinary Society, so you'll be able to pick whether you'd like to follow a small animal/exotic/equine stream or a farm animal stream. In doing this we hope that there will be something for everybody to enjoy, no matter where their interests lie.

Sneak preview

Confirmed speakers:

- Steve Leonard (TV vet, and star of 'Vet School', and 'Vets in Practice');
- Brian Faulkner (who aims to make welfare interesting);
- BVA past-president, Carl Padgett (a farm vet);
- Medivet's, Erwin Hohn (how hands-on changes as your career progresses).

Confirmed practicals.

- Hands-on ultrasound (including on horse's legs and live dogs);
- Hands-on farm animal cases;
- Pet poultry handling sessions;
- Clinical skills 101 (for preclinical and clinical students).

We're also following the fairly new tradition of hosting a Congress



Career's Fair, which offers delegates the chance to speak to representatives from the major veterinary divisions about career advice and networking.

If the prospect of meeting new people, learning new things and enhancing your practical skills doesn't tempt you, maybe the social side of AVS Congress Edinburgh will. Friday night will find 200 vet students in Edinburgh's city centre visiting a variety of Edinburgh's finest and quirkiest pubs. Saturday's

ball will see the sophistication scale going up a few notches with the annual black-tie ball, and a chance to don your DJs and dancing shoes, enjoy a three-course meal and wine a-plenty, and celebrate being a vet student in style!

If the idea of learning something new and enhancing your 'hands-on' skills in the fabulous city of Edinburgh is tickling your fancy, make sure you keep January 25 to 27 free . . . it's promising to be a good one!



BVA CAREERS SERVICE

Introducing a new member service offering individual career coaching options at highly discounted rates.

One-to-one coaching is available by email, phone or in person and will give you the opportunity to gain skilled and impartial professional advice on your career issue, whether you are interested in making decisions about your future career, increasing your effectiveness in job hunting and applications, or considering a complete career change.

BVA membership category/advice type	BVA member prices (ex VAT)	Non-member prices (ex VAT)	Member saving (ex VAT)
YVN or concessionary 1 hour one-to-one	£100	£160	£60
Standard BVA 1 hour one-to-one	£140	£160	£20
YVN or concessionary 30 minute phone call	£55	Not available	N/A
Standard 30 minute phone call	£75	Not available	N/A
YVN or concessionary email	£44	£56	£12
Standard email	£51	£56	£5

Book your appointment now

Call 020 7863 6060 or
email bva@careers.lon.ac.uk
www.bva.co.uk/c2careers

Some of the issues that could be addressed in a career coaching session include:

- Evaluating and enhancing your approach to progressing your career
- Identifying, researching and exploring career options
- Making important decisions about your future career path
- Developing practical career action plans to increase your chances of success
- Overcoming setbacks and problems in your career
- Returning to employment after a break
- Building confidence in your skills and abilities
- Presenting your experience and achievements more effectively on paper and at interview



YOUNG VET NETWORK Services & Benefits

The **Young Vet Network** (YVN) is a graduate support initiative for BVA members from their final year of study up to eight years qualified. Some of the exclusive benefits available to YVN members include:

- ★ Free personal accident insurance
- ★ 30% discount off Improve International's one-day UK CPD courses
- ★ 50% discount off selected RVC CPD courses
- ★ Reduced membership rates
- ★ A copy of the comprehensive 'BVA new graduate guide'
- ★ Access to free equine CPD
- ★ Membership of a secure online discussion forum
- ★ Graduate representation on the BVA Council

All of this is **free of charge** on top of the normal membership package.

 www.bva.co.uk/youngvetnetwork

There's no better time
than now to be a recent
graduate member



Working for you



An old disease still running rife through our herds

By Suzanne Bailey (4th Year, Bristol)

Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) is a chronic, debilitating disease of cattle that has been around for centuries. Some countries, such as Australia and Scotland, have successfully eradicated the disease; however, in South West England and Wales the cases of bTB have been increasing.

In 2011, over 26,000 cattle were slaughtered and over £91 million was spent trying to control this disease. The lack of efficient control has left many farmers frustrated and depressed and feeling forced to leave the industry.

Mycobacterium bovis, the pathogen responsible for bTB, is a gram positive, aerobic, bacillus with a mycolic acid-rich cell wall giving it the characteristic properties of being both acid-fast with Ziehl-Neelsen stain, and able to survive in mononuclear phagocytes and the environment for lengthy periods. It is believed it maintains its population in a number of species forming a 'multi-host complex'.

The species involved can be grouped into different types of hosts: a maintenance host is a species where the pathogen can multiply and spread among individuals without the need for re-introduction of the pathogen from another source, a spillover host that can be further split into a dead end host (a host that cannot spread the infection) and an amplifier host (a host that probably can spread the infection, but needs continual re-introduction of the pathogen).

In order to control bTB there must be control measures for all the maintenance hosts: no country has managed eradication of the disease without controlling disease in all maintenance hosts.



Tuberculin skin test used in cattle. Pictures from Defra, www.defra.gov.uk



A badger gains access to a farm building. Part of controlling bTB involves improving on-farm biosecurity

In the UK, the maintenance hosts are believed to be cattle and badgers, although how great a source of infection badgers present varies greatly in the literature. In areas where bTB has been proven to be endemic in the badger population, it would appear sensible to control the disease. However, as bTB can infect a large range of species, in other areas there may be other maintenance hosts such as deer or alpacas, which may need control measures enforced.

At the moment, the government has been focusing on controlling bTB in badgers; however the proposed cull in Wales was replaced with a vaccination programme and there has been recent unhappiness at the proposed culls in West Gloucestershire and West Somerset. Although it is never pleasant to kill our native species, in my opinion, in areas where badgers are thought to be acting as a maintenance species and are endemically infected, a vaccine is going to be ineffective and so a cull is the only option. However, this cull needs to be welfare-friendly and efficient, removing the badger population in that area, and co-ordinated across all areas where bTB is endemic in the badger population. I also feel the badgers on the outskirts of these culling areas should be covered using vaccination. Incidentally, the perturbation effect, the concept of worried badgers

spreading the disease further when culling begins has been shown to be only a short-term effect.

In other locations, I believe the wildlife vector should be thoroughly investigated and identified so control measures in those species can begin.

Control of the disease in cattle also needs to be addressed. The current tuberculin skin test has low sensitivity; cattle that have been tested as TB-negative have been seen to show visible lesions at slaughter. On top of this, the strain of *M bovis* used in the test has not been seen in our cattle for years. Currently, control of the disease in cattle may also involve use of the gamma interferon blood test (once a breakdown is confirmed), along with movement restrictions and improved biosecurity.

To eradicate bTB I believe we need a government committed to the farmers and consequently to eradicating the disease, which will create a long-term plan that covers all aspects of the pathogen. I feel a badger cull would be integral to bTB eradication; however, it needs to be used in conjunction with other measures and carried out uniformly over areas where bTB is endemic in badger populations.

Training the animal or training the owner?

By Sarah Bird

How do you desensitise a horse to take injections? How do you stop a camel kicking you? How do you get a llama to exercise its neck muscles after a long period of stable rest, or get a giraffe to offer its nose while you apply a topical cream inside its nostrils? Sarah Bird describes her work with animal behaviour.

Handling and desensitising animals for clinical intervention needn't be a struggle; in fact, with lashings of coffee and some good French sunshine, it's a joy!

A few years ago, I received an urgent call from a groom in a local chateau not far from us here in rural France. The groom was in charge of four rather expensive horses, one of which (a stallion) had backed into a wire fence and caused tendon damage and deep skin lacerations to its hind legs. The owners were away, the vet had been, and it had taken over an hour to calm the horse down to inject it. It was a bank holiday weekend, the vet left syringes for the next three days and the groom was expected to continue with the course of antibiotics on his own.

Getting this highly strung horse to walk patiently was hard enough, tying him up was virtually impossible, and he'd managed to break several bars of his stable in his struggle with the vet – simply compounding his nervous and somewhat aggressive disposition! Work with this horse was not for the faint hearted, and I arrived with steel toe cap boots, and a mobile phone in pocket ready to phone the emergency services. I had two hours to desensitise this horse to take its next injection.

Armed with a clicker and a bag of hastily chopped carrots and apples, the groom held the horse in his yard, with space around us to get out of the way if necessary. With clicker in hand, I pressed down and offered the horse a treat. I clicked again, offered another treat and repeated this process several times. I walked away to the edge of the yard and asked the groom to get me a coffee. The groom, a super experienced guy shipped in from a UK racing stable, looked at me as if I'd gone mad. He detached the rope from the stallion's headcollar and went off to make me coffee. I sat on the rails of the yard and ignored the horse, likewise, he ignored me!

After my first coffee, I walked back into the yard, the stallion looked up towards me, and as he did, I clicked my clicker, and offered him a treat. Then, click, and treat once again, I repeated this process several times and then walked to the edge of the yard to the groom to get another coffee. While I sat on the rails of the

yard, the stallion walked over to me – as he approached I clicked again and gave him a treat.

Three cups of coffee and an hour later, the stallion would come when I called him, and would associate the clicking noise I was making with a treat . . . we were making progress, though the groom was convinced I'd gone nuts.

The next task was to get to his neck. The horse realised that, when he was good, he got a click and a treat; when the horse backed off, or behaved inappropriately towards me, I ignored him. With the clicker ready I stood beside his head, and moved my hand up towards his neck. He stepped back out of my reach, so I turned my back and ignored him. As I took a step away from the horse, he joined me, so I clicked and fed him, and as I did, his ears came forwards and he took another step towards me, so I clicked again and again offered more carrot. Another step forwards, and this time I turned towards him, and went to stroke his neck. He didn't



move, so I clicked and rewarded him again, and repeated the process several times while stroking his neck.

Coffee is a vital part of life in the South of France, and so, off I went again for my fourth cup, and sat back on the rails. The stallion followed me, but this time I completely ignored him and after several minutes he gave up and turned away from me. The groom was bewildered and panicking slightly so I sent him off to fetch another drink while I carried on alone with the stallion.

I walked back into the yard and called the horse to come over; as his head was in line with my body, I clicked again, and moved my hand towards his neck. Once again, he didn't flinch – perfect! I moved my hand down his neck and pinched lightly at the sight where I was going to inject him. As I pinched, the horse flinched, but didn't move away, and so I clicked and rewarded him. Again I repeated the process. When he moved away he got no reward, when I got no negative response, he got the click and the carrot.

I left the horse for a good 20 minutes while I had a tour of the chateau grounds and then armed myself with the syringe. On my return, the stallion's ears came forward and he walked towards me. You know the routine now: I clicked and rewarded him, I touched his neck and, again, I clicked and rewarded him. Next, I put my hand in the pocket for the syringe. Again, I ran my hand down his neck with the syringe in it and pinched at the muscle point; each time he was clicked and his lack of negative response rewarded.



Now it was crunch time! The stallion was not tied up, I had one chance to get this right. Positioning the syringe in my hand, I ran my wrist alongside the horse's neck and when I got to the muscle, I injected him. He stood stock still. At the same time, I clicked and rewarded. Job done, but not finished, I popped the syringe in my pocket and continued stroking his neck and rewarding him.

I'm not suggesting for one minute that budding vets should spend two hours of their clients' money on desensitising their horse. However, if the owner, groom or jockey of the horse has been given a few minutes of advice on the desensitisation process, your life could be much easier each time you need to inject a flighty horse.

The following day, I visited the horse again. With his head up and his ears forward, he came over to me. We repeated the exercise from the day before and within 30 minutes, I had injected him. Day 3 was a walk in the park... or should I say the chateau grounds! As I got out of the car, the stallion walked over

to me, ears forward, and turned his neck towards me almost inviting me to inject him. Success!

Desensitising animals takes a little time and a lot of patience: it's more about the discipline of the trainer, and committing to a training regimen. Throughout your veterinary career, you will have countless clients in consultations who complain their dog pulls, or their cat messes in the house. This year alone, my EMS students have desensitised an alpaca from aggressive kicking, trained pigs to poo outside the house and got a goose – yes, a goose – to walk to heel. The question is... whose behaviour is the problem?

■ Sarah Bird lectures on animal behaviour throughout Europe, and works with leading vets and zoos all over the world; she also runs animal behaviour workshops and courses. She has limited EMS placements at her camelid farm in south west France. For further information contact camelsinfrance@gmail.com or visit the website – www.camelsinfrance.eu

The dreaded car journey

By Sophie Bagnall (Final-Year, Nottingham)

As a fifth year vet student almost a third of my way through rotations, I have unconsciously gained a skill that I am unsure whether to add to my CV.

I find that I have the ability to sit in a car with any stranger and drum up a decent amount of conversation to last 10 to 50 minutes without fail. Who would have guessed that four-and-a-third years studying veterinary medicine and science would put me in so many cars with so many different qualified vets? From asking around the students in my year, I've discovered that the car journey from call-to-call is a fear shared by many of us.

The universities appear to have spared the 'car etiquette' module from our already packed curriculums. So, how are we supposed to know how to behave when let loose in these veterinary cars? Hopefully this article will provide a few tips and insights.

The sad truth is that from the moment the car door shuts and the ignition is fired, it's just you and the vet in each other's personal space for an indeterminable amount of time. It is vital that within that first mile of road you suss out your companion. Vets tend to fall into three distinct categories: The silence seekers, the chatters and the grillers.

Silence seekers

- Pretty easy to deal with – so long as you don't take their antisocial tendencies personally.
- Most silence seekers will give you subtle hints indicating that they're not in the mood to talk; whether it's by playing with their phone or turning the radio up.
- In the car of a silence seeker it should be easy for us – all you have to do is sit and admire the view. However, if like me you're a bit of a talker it can



be very difficult not to strive to make some failing attempts at conversation. Try to refrain from asking desperate questions such as, 'What kind of music do you like?' (cringe).

- Warning: 'Silent' vets are often the ones that like to spontaneously start singing along to the radio. This leaves you in an awkward situation. Do you join in? Or do you sit there awkwardly while they sing along to 'Respect' by Aretha Franklin? I've tried both methods – and it didn't feel right doing either. A happy medium is to drum along to the song on your lap. This allows you to look like you're appreciating the music, but doesn't fully commit you to singing "R.E.S.P.E.C.T" at the top of your voice.

Chatterers

- Chatty vets are a blissful car experience for most. Car journeys just go so much faster when you have a vet that actually wants to talk to you!
- Be prepared to go through the utter bore of telling someone your life story for the millionth time, 'Hi my name is X, I go to Y vet school, I come from Z.'
- If you have trouble finding some conversation starters, there are always the fall-back topics which

you are likely have in common: fancy dress (particularly cross-dressing), excessive drinking, money problems and, of course, your amazing AVS experiences.

- When the inevitable question comes; 'What kind of vet do you want to be?' I find that 'mixed' is always a pretty safe answer. It avoids the immediate judgement that follows when you say you want to be a 'small animal vet' (non-outdoorsy townie), 'farm vet' (inbred farmer) or 'equine' (posh).

Grillers

- Oh dear, you've landed a griller. Now you're in trouble.
- Grillers like to launch into a relentless torrent of clinical questions that leave you feeling both mentally violated and embarrassed by your appalling knowledge at this stage in the course.
- It is very difficult to gauge when the next griller will appear. When you hear the old favourite conversation starter, 'So you're a new grad and it's your first day in practice . . .' or 'Imagine it's 3 am and you're driving to your first call out . . .' you know it's time to start panicking.
- Do your reading; grillers have an amazing knack for pulling out questions on that one disease

you've been meaning to look up since the start of your rotation.

- Know when to admit defeat: grillers will get immense enjoyment from firing endless questions at you until finally they win and you get a question wrong/say something completely stupid.

I'm afraid that enduring an excruciating grilling is a rite of passage for any vet student at any stage in the course. There is no real way to prepare you for this; however, over the years there are some neat techniques that can help you deflect or at least reduce the extent of an in-car grilling:

- Ask them so many questions that they can't get a word in edgewise to direct one at you.
- While pondering over an answer to a difficult question try to distract them with a more in depth question.
- Play the experience card by asking: 'Has this ever happened to you before?' Getting them to talk about their own experiences makes them forget about this current experience sat in the car with you.
- Point out an interesting landmark and try to steer the conversation towards a different topic altogether (preferably non-veterinary related).
- Hope they run over a badger and/or crash the car to end your suffering quickly.

So, you've sussed out what kind of vet you're with. Now you actually have to arrive at the correct destination alive – which can be a high-risk procedure in itself. The lack of basic driving skills vets seem to possess never ceases to amaze me. Over the years we are witness to countless episodes of road rage, speeding and squeezing through the smallest farm lanes possible. If you can develop one skill before final year, make it your compass and map-reading skills. The chances are that the second you sit down in a vet's car they'll allocate you the role of 'navigator' so you'd better be prepared! Also whatever you do, never

openly comment on the vet's driving, unless you want to be walking or – the ultimate insult – following in the car behind. I heard about a vet who was frustrated stuck behind slow traffic. When she lamented, 'Why the hell does everyone drive so slowly?', the student remarked, 'Maybe you just drive too fast' (cue frosty silence).

So, you've arrived at the farm in one piece. You've nailed those bull castrates and are covered head to toe in cow poo. You've discovered mid-disinfecting that your cheap waterproof trousers are no longer waterproof and now your chinos are soaked. All that stands in the way of you and that warm cup of tea back at the practice is the long car journey home. At least on your return you can discuss the previous case or gossip about the client. When that conversation wears out, and you nestle further

into the warmth of the car, the battle with sleep will commence. As the car rocks you from side to side, you can feel your head nodding and your surroundings fading from view. You're going to fall asleep, and there's nothing you can do about it. I wondered, would the vet be more annoyed if I fell asleep, or if I fiddled with his air con, opened the window, ate some more food, or just said loudly, 'I'm falling asleep now'. I'm afraid there's no way of dodging the sleeping bullet: if you fall asleep you are just going to have to deal with the consequences!

Of course all these car journeys provide you with great preparation for that glorious day when you are the vet driving with that annoying EMS student. Then your driving skills will slide, you will become a dysfunctional satnav and, of course, you'll have to decide if you're a chatterer, a silence-seeker, or a griller.

Ten top tips to survive veterinary car journeys

Tip 1

Get used to Radio 4; you'll eventually welcome a pleasant voice to break the awkward silence, even if it is only the shipping forecast.

Tip 2

Encourage your vet to keep their eyes on the road at all times, and not on animals/farm machinery/crops in fields.

Tip 3

You will discover that legs (more specifically, knees) are classed as legitimate limbs with which to steer a car while eating/map reading, etc.

Tip 4

Make sure your lunch is as olfactorily inoffensive as possible; this is especially the case if you have no option but to leave your lunch unattended in the car with a canine companion.

Tip 5

Dogs will eat plastic sandwich bags

if it means that they get the grub too.

Tip 6

Navigation lessons should be a compulsory part of all vet courses.

Tip 7

If sleep does hit you, try your best not to dribble over the vet's shoulder, snore or shout profanities (you may laugh, but it has happened).

Tip 8

Being asked to follow behind in your own car is a sign that you have room for improvement.

Tip 9

Students should understand their place in the pecking order. Space in the car is prioritised for dogs, lunch, equipment, and miscellaneous items, before students.

Tip 10

If all else fails, make silence your friend.

Vets, science and social awareness

By Hannah Thomas (1st Year, Liverpool)

During my campus tour of Liverpool University, our guide coaxed us towards a huge white building and announced: 'This is the Harold Cohen Library. It's the science library on campus. This is the library you will use as veterinary students. The university does have another library, but it is for the arts so you will never need to go there.'

I found myself questioning the guide. Is 'veterinary medicine' simply science and curing ill health? I believe the journey to becoming a competent and influential vet is very much an art. I experienced one side of this art in unique circumstances – South Africa. Africa is a world of extremes – white people and black people, rich and poor – living together. In my opinion, South Africa has one of the most diverse social environments in the world. How, though, does this social awareness associate with the veterinary profession?

During my gap year, I was lucky enough to spend two months in South Africa. For part of this time I shadowed an ambulatory equine vet. Most of his patients were privately owned pleasure horses in the southern suburbs of Cape Town, which meant they were exclusively white people with a comfortable income.

However, on my second day there I saw a completely different world. The vet and I travelled a short way

inland to an area called the 'Cape Flats', an expansive low-lying flat area, southeast of Cape Town. Due to the segregated history of South Africa, this was essentially an area where the non-white people lived, most of whom had very little money.

As we approached a township called Phillipi, the vet warned me, 'Hannah, we must make sure we lock the car if we leave it. And don't leave any money or valuables on show, it's not fair to the people who live here.' That made me slightly apprehensive.

The vet then continued, 'Try not to be alarmed about the way the horses we are about to see are kept; their owners love them very much and do their absolute best for them.' I was intrigued about the appointments we had lined up.

We reached our first stop and were warmly welcomed through a wobbling, rusty gate by two huge men, to find a couple of tiny corrugated iron sheds surrounded by barbed wire, debris; the sheds were covered in multiple padlocks. Out of the shed stepped the most beautiful Welsh pony stallion in superb condition. We vaccinated the horse against African Horse Sickness and were quickly presented with six more ponies from the tiny shed; again, all in perfect condition. It was humbling to see that these two men were so devoted to their ponies. I felt like the ponies had given them a direction in life and in return the men had provided the best possible care that they could afford.

Our next call was to a miniature hackney pony yard in the township. This time, the owners were from one of the more wealthy households within the community, and they had managed to provide small brick dwellings for their steeds. As we vaccinated the horses and sifted through identification paperwork a long line of men, hands on shoulders, marched through the yard, chanting.

'Hannah, the owner of these ponies runs a drug rehabilitation centre for young drug addicts in the area,' the vet informed me. I was shocked to hear that each man in the chain was a recovering addict. It was something that I had never experienced before.

The owner of the ponies then approached me, looked directly into my eyes and said, with confidence, 'Young lady, if we didn't have the horses here, there would be so many more men in this town with drug problems. In fact, it would be worse, some men would have nothing to fill their time with and instead would turn to violent crime. The horses are so much more to us than pets, they have helped to positively shape our social environment.'

The man's words were inspirational, and that day made me realise that the veterinary profession is not simply about the animal in front of you, it is just as much about the people around you. That, for me, is 'the art of veterinary medicine', and for that reason I'm definitely going to be using the arts library too.

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Cambridge: showing the way in student welfare

By Becky Corke (4th Year, Cambridge, and associate of the Cambridge University Veterinary Society [CUVS] Committee)

This academic year has been one of welfare-related firsts for Cambridge Vet School, culminating in the hosting of two welfare-themed events for pre-clinical and clinical students respectively.

My involvement in vet student welfare began last March when I became the first ever pastoral representative on the Cambridge University Veterinary Society (CUVS) committee. Ironically, for someone hoping to improve student welfare, I then had to defer my studies due to my own poor welfare (illness), but, fortunately, this gave me a huge insight into the value of the services that I was hoping to help to promote. Although I had to give up my post as pastoral rep, I was unwilling to sit at home and vegetate, and instead I returned to Cambridge and agreed to help out the committee on an unofficial basis where I could.

After some encouragement from AVS, inspired by Nottingham's lead as the first vet school to put on a welfare event the previous year, on November 22, 2011, CUVS held its first ever lunchtime welfare event in the town centre for the pre-clinical vet students. Around 20 representatives were present, from university services, student union groups and campaigns, veterinary organisations, and local and national charities – with information from many other services to hand. The informal atmosphere allowed students the freedom to approach the various representatives for answers to their specific queries, or to obtain more general information.

We were also pleased to welcome two guest speakers. The first, Lisa Déry from the Students' Union Student Advisory Service, provided information about the sup-



Lunch was only part of the welfare package on offer

port that students could expect to receive from her team in a time of difficulty – a service that many attendees will hopefully never have reason to need, but whose existence must be reassuring nonetheless. Similarly, Rory O'Connor of the Veterinary Surgeons' Health Support Programme (VSHSP) spoke realistically about the mental health challenges the profession faces, and described the tailored, individual support that the VSHSP can provide to combat problems, even to us as students. A free buffet lunch (freshly prepared that morning in chain gang fashion by the

CUVS committee), plus entry into a raffle for all attendees, ensured that the event was a huge success, with second year student Henry Dillon winning the first prize of a Littmann stethoscope.

On February 17, 2012, expanding on the idea of a lunchtime welfare event, CUVS held a full day of welfare-based events for the clinical vet students at the vet school. This was purposely scheduled to coincide with another first – a university wide mental health week run by the Student Union, in which a series of events ran across the university.

A lunchtime event similar to the



Both lunchtime events were well attended

pre-clinical event was held, with the same representatives, the same guest speakers, and the same food, prepared once again by the committee, well drilled the second time round in near-industrial levels of sandwich making and cake baking. We were pleased to be able to offer even more freebies to students who signed up online to receive a free chlamydia testing kit through the post, in association with local sexual health charity DHIVerse. And, once again, all attendees were entered into a raffle, this time sponsored by Hill's Nutrition, with the first prize of a three-month supply of Hill's Science Plan pet food going to final-year student Chris Webb.

The second of the day's events was an all-day bake sale, to jointly raise money for the Veterinary Benevolent Fund and help subsidise the vet school yoga sessions. Finally, the welfare theme was incorporated within the usual Friday evening 'happy hour', a longer weekly session where staff and students come together in an informal setting to eat, drink and discuss a brief

presentation on a topic of interest. We were pleased to welcome Mike Bell, leadership and organisational development consultant, to present a talk entitled 'mindfulness and the brain'. Mindfulness is a technique recognised by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence for its effectiveness in stress reduction. It is also an approach increasingly being utilised by athletes to enhance their performance and, in his talk, Mike particularly extolled its use in a learning situation. Those keen to try out mindfulness-based relaxation for themselves were invited to take part in one of the sessions held by one of our clinicians at the vet school, Murray Corke, later on in the term.

Reflecting on the experience, I would say that, despite the fact that we provided free food, I was staggered at how well attended the two lunchtime events were. It is possible that I am underestimating people's appetite for stuff that is free, or even their undying raffle-based optimism but, if not, and if perhaps people felt like there was something they hoped to gain from



Every attendee was entered into a raffle

attending beyond a free cheese and pickle sandwich, I would urge any vet schools who have not yet put on their own similar event to ask themselves why this is the case. It was simple enough to organise, and if, clichéd as it may sound, we have in some way provided reassurance to even one student, that in my mind is reward enough for doing it. Just to be absolutely clear, the feedback I have had suggests that this has absolutely been the case – so why not start organising today?

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Animal testing – what about the welfare?

By Andy Yale (3rd Year, Nottingham)

During my six-month internship with a large pharmaceutical company in Switzerland (as part of my third-year research project), I had the chance to see the animal welfare conditions in a large-scale research environment.

Everybody has an image in their mind (some more positive than others) as to the care and welfare of animals involved in scientific research, and I was no different. I knew that on the one hand the welfare has to meet strict guidelines, and that it's in the researchers' interest to have healthy and happy animals. On the other hand, you hear many stories of neglected and abused animals, which, true or not, certainly make you think twice about the conditions in which animals are kept in research facilities. So before arriving I had no clear expectations.

I am pleased to say that I was very pleasantly surprised, impressed in fact, at the level of welfare, care and attention that the animals received. The colony consisted of over 400 beagles and, despite each dog being identified by a number, each was cared for individually. There was a dedicated and passionate animal care team which worked alongside the numerous onsite vets to ensure high welfare for the dogs.

The housing environment depended on whether the dog was involved in a study or not. If they were, they were housed individually or in pairs indoors for the duration of the study, which was not often longer than three months. Each kennel was about 3 m x 2 m and had a bare floor, a water dispenser, an elevated bench, and some of the dogs' favourite toys. Admittedly, it appeared quite sterile and without much stimulation or enrichment

for the dog, but conditions had to be tightly regulated and standardised throughout the course of the study and any objects that could potentially disrupt this were forbidden. The dogs spent a couple of hours outside each day as a group, with the opportunity to interact with each other, stretch their legs, and generally express their natural behaviours. While inside they appeared calm and were always happy to see you, and loved being fussed over – like any typical dog. So, in this respect their mental well-being seemed good.

The care team thoroughly cleaned the kennels three to four times a day and checked the health of the dogs regularly. Their claws were frequently clipped, their ears cleaned, and any problems were attended to promptly by a vet; an onsite veterinary room was stocked with the latest treatments and equipment.

When the dogs were not being used in a study, they were housed in what can only be described as a canine luxury hotel.

They lived in groups of about 10 dogs and had a large, stimulating area to play in, with both indoor and outside areas. The pen was stocked with play equipment, toys and textured flooring for the dogs to explore. They could choose to go outside during any time of the day, and the indoors area was airy with lots of natural light. Again, the area was spotless, and their health was checked regularly. All of the dogs were fed a top quality, well-

balanced diet, with their weight individually assessed and rations adjusted accordingly to ensure perfect body condition.

In my opinion their welfare, both physical and mental, was extremely good – certainly the best it could be considering the circumstances. I would argue that they were better cared for than some pet dogs as no health concern went unnoticed, nutrition was optimal, and they got natural interaction with their friends in a stimulating environment (when not in studies).

While partaking in a study their lifestyle was more limited, but the welfare was as good as it could be and the dogs seemed to be happy and content.

I am pleased to have had the opportunity to see this environment,

as it has confirmed to me that the welfare of animals in scientific research is very good. Of course, I can only say this for the pharmaceutical company I worked with, but can assume it is similar across the board. I hope that this article will settle any concerns that others may have over the welfare of animals in large research settings.

I'll finish by saying that I think the reason the dogs were numbered rather than named is not to aid data recording and maintain scientific 'professionalism' as you may think – it was because no-one was patient (or imaginative) enough to find individual names for over 400 similar beagles.

'I am pleased to say that I was very pleasantly surprised – impressed in fact – at the level of welfare, care and attention that the animals received.'

Boar's semen and Lady Gaga: the trials and tribulations of pig farming EMS

By Sabrina Estabrook-Russett (2nd Year, Edinburgh)

A few months ago I spent one of those beautiful Scottish summer mornings watching a 450 kg pig ejaculate into a Thermos flask that was being held at an appropriate 'catch-all' angle by a bearded Slovenian man.

This particular pig husbandry EMS placement didn't start out as a particularly memorable occasion. I'd been on the 'pitching' end of artificial insemination a few times before, but this was admittedly my first experience as a catcher or pseudo-catcher, or, most accurately, a peeping Tom catcher, because I didn't actually do any catching whatsoever. I just stood at a reasonable distance, so that I could see the action, and hopefully not end up with boar semen in my hair (which would probably be similar to the time I got horse semen in my hair).

None of the ejaculation processes took me by surprise, but what happened after the release was uncharted territory. Emerging victorious with the cheesecloth-lined Thermos, the Slovenian brought it to me, proud of his harvest, bursting at the seams to tell me all about it. I looked down at the post-ejaculatory product that was the consistency of a gelatinous glue that cements the semen into the sow as it solidifies. I was not as enthralled as the Slovenian, but this was one of those instances in life when you pretend to be happy for your friend just because he is so happy with himself. I layered on a heavy facade of delight and exhilaration.

After this we had to test the quality of the semen. He explained:



'We test by all the senses – see, touch, smell, taste. You want taste?'

'Um. No, thank-you.'

'When boar young, semen sweet. When boar old, semen bitter. We taste.'

At that moment the radio was playing Lady Gaga and I stood there with suspicious, squinty eyes wondering how likely it was that the entire universe was messing with me. I am typically pretty good at knowing when I am the butt of the joke, but I couldn't read the Slovenian at all. In the end, we did not taste.

Here's the thing, you guys: going into this gig I think we all assume that a fair amount of semen goes with the territory. This is not a statement that many professionals get to make; we are of an elite creed. Vet kids, as a general rule, are unphased by the wide array of bodily fluids that we encounter on a near-daily basis. The realm of what we find disgusting is routinely

stretched wider; each new abscess or laceration or rectal exam reaches that curious point where it changes from loathsome to commonplace. Mucous, saliva and semen are just part of life. Moreover, these encounters often seem to lodge themselves into our new identities; they are rights of passage. I imagine that in 10 years' time we will still be swapping stories about that time we contracted crypto or ringworm. So I understood; I knew what I was getting into.

I will happily guard precious high-quality semen from unscrupulous thieves. I will store the liquid nitrogen tank in a cool, clean, dry, dust-free, well-ventilated area of my surgery. I will hold the freezing straws in my armpit so as to warm them to an appropriate bodily temperature, and I will smear a drop onto a glass slide to check to see that you've ordered healthy sperm. But I will not, ever, under any circumstances, taste it.

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Hands-on rabies control in India

By Jennie McMullan (Senior Rep, 4th Year, Glasgow)

'I'm not sure this was one of our better ideas. This was the thought that crossed my mind when I saw a propeller-driven plane sitting on the hot tarmac at Delhi's Indira Gandhi Airport. The plane was the final step of our lengthy travels to Dharamsala, a town nestled high in the Himalayas, which is the home of the Dharamsala Animal Rescue Centre. For the next two weeks or so, it would also be home for me and my partner-in-adventure, Rosie.



We weren't sure what to expect when we signed up to volunteer in a veterinary rescue clinic in India, but the promise of hands-on experience, including the Holy Grail for third year vet students – the opportunity to carry out spaying and neutering – was enough to lure us in.

After a day spent settling into our guest house and getting to know its hilarious staff, we were picked up bright and early on Monday morning to start work. We arrived to find the clinic was, as described, in the jungle. A clump of basic but neat buildings housed a small, dedicated team, and, by the volume of barking, a fair few dogs. Introductions were made to the team: a qualified vet, Dr Dev, and his paravets (similar to veterinary nurses) – also qualified in dog catching, animal mountain rescue, off-road driving and cooking excellent lunches, we discovered. The team also included the resident population of pet dogs; a motley crew of characters who'd come in for treatment and never left, all varying in shape, size and number of legs.

The clinic's mission is simple: to control the massive street dog population in the region; to help to reduce the number of rabies cases; and to improve the welfare of ani-

mals through community education and good quality medical care. It sounds good on paper, and is frankly amazing when you consider the clinic runs only on donations (most of these international) to provide its work for free.

Our role was to get stuck in and help wherever we could, hopefully learning something along the way. And so we did; watching the neurological assessments of RTA victims, unwinding wire from poor creatures that had been caught in snares, and removing maggots from the many nasty wounds arriving in the ambulance each morning.

Surgery was done every other day, depending on how successful an evening's 'catch' had been, and how many kennels we had free, but our chance to prove our clinical skills came round very quickly indeed. The team swung into action like a well-oiled machine, and soon we were scrubbed and disinfected, standing in front of a factory line of unconscious, unsuspecting pooches for spays, neuters, rabies jabs and ear notching (the signature of a trip to the 'ops' table). After finally persuading the unflappable Dr Dev that we definitely did not want to 'just go for it', we got a speedy run through of the right-

flank method of spaying and the equipment that was available.

Starting with castration duty, we dutifully overcame our nerves to begin working as a slow (very slow) but steady team, panicking at any sight of blood of uncertain origin and pestering everyone with questions, concerns and nervous laughter. With the boys poking fun at us at every turn and shouts of 'Dr Jannie, Dr Rodie, hurry up', the atmosphere soon lightened up, and before we knew it, it was time for lunch and the day's gonad removal was done.

As time went on, we slowly grew in confidence, if not neatness... and tackled a decent number of flank spays in addition to our now efficient castrations. In the tropical heat the sweat poured off our red Irish faces, our Irish bellies rumbled at the smells floating from the hotplate outside, and the arrival of the Monsoon season challenged us to game of 'find the ovary' in total darkness when the power went out. However, it is not the Indian way to panic, so an undefined head wiggle from the boys came to mean anything from, 'Yes, that's the ovary' to, 'No, you shouldn't have cut that' and 'Just drag the table to the window and the daylight will have to do'.



Gradually, their ever-positive attitude began to rub off, and we stopped freezing in fear at a spraying blood vessel or a snapped ligature, and were almost able to hold a conversation while putting in intradermal sutures.

It wasn't just dogs that needed the clinic's help; among our patients was a pint-sized cow whose tangle with a snare left her needing hours of maggot removal, debridement and cleaning up, only for her badly damaged cleats to fall off entirely,

leaving her with a stump to hobble around on. We also had 'the creature' – a cute-looking ball of fur with large eyes and an attitude problem (apparently it was a sky fox) – that had lost the use of its back legs. He had a penchant for biting glucose biscuits and puppies or people daft enough to get fingers/noses close enough to him.

Our two weeks at the clinic went by all too quickly, and before we knew it, it was time to say goodbye and head off for the next phase of

our trip. I could write pages about our mini adventure; but will leave it at this. We ate good food, saw incredible sights, learned a lot and made good friends. Volunteering opened our eyes to how much is possible with so little, taught us a something about panic management and provided a serious amount of laughs. We left our new friends, two-legged, four-legged and three-legged with sadness, but a promise to be return when we're qualified and useful 'doctahs', if not before!



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Francesca Scott was awarded a Harry Steele-Bodger Memorial Scholarship in 2012. The grant enabled her to undertake an elective project on the economics of bovine tuberculosis in the Greater Accra region of Ghana

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Veterinary students as global citizens symposium

The Royal Veterinary College is involved with other London universities in a collaborative project called 'Students as Global Citizens'. This focuses on developing ways of embedding global issues within degree courses on pharmacy, veterinary science and human health.

The RVC is holding a symposium on the afternoon of November 27, at its Camden campus. Lord

Trees (Emeritus Professor of Veterinary Parasitology, University of Liverpool) has agreed to speak, alongside Professor Anthony Costello (Director of the UCL Institute of Global Health), Professor Felicity Smith (from the UCL School of Pharmacy who has an interest in global pharmacy education), Professor Richard Kock (RVC) and Professor Peter Roeder (International Consultant who led the Global Rinderpest Eradication Programme 2000/07).

Full details of the programme and

how to register (free) can be found at www.rvc.ac.uk/global

The speakers will discuss the increasing importance of educating undergraduate students about global and international development topics, and how interdisciplinary collaboration between the different health disciplines can be a useful tool to do this. It is hoped that students, academics and practising vets will come along and be prepared to contribute; the organisers hope the event will lead to some positive next steps and new collaborations.



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