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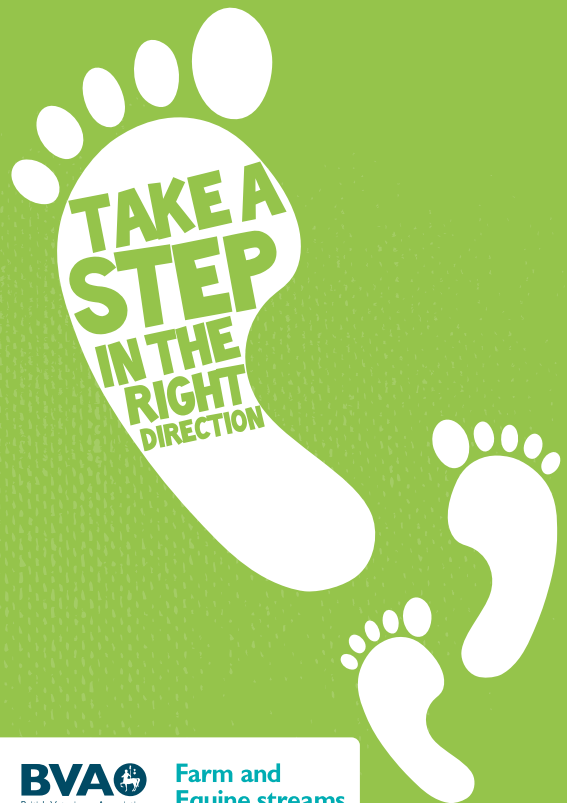
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AVS CONTACTS

President, Nic Wojciechowski
avspresident@gmail.com

Senior Vice President, Chris Ogden
avsseniorvicepresident@gmail.com

**Junior Vice President,
Alex McGhee**
am0567@bristol.ac.uk

Secretary, Jennie McMullan
0908405m@student.gla.ac.uk

Treasurer, Jenny Brazier
jbrazier@vc.ac.uk

Welfare, Fliss Barber
avs.welfare@gmail.com

IVSA, Vicky Carliell
07793 037285

JAVS Editor, Max Foreman
javseditor@hotmail.com

AVS Marketing, Dom Byron Chance
avsmarketingofficer@gmail.com

Web Editor, Tom Bayes
svytb@nottingham.ac.uk

BRISTOL

Craig Fairburn, Bristol Senior:
cf1686@my.bristol.ac.uk

CAMBRIDGE

Gemma Longson, Cambridge Senior:
gel23@cam.ac.uk

DUBLIN

Marcel Hanley, Dublin Senior:
marcel.hanley.1@ucdconnect.ie
Amy Fitzgerald, Dublin Junior:
amyfitz@mac.com

EDINBURGH

Matthew Erskine, Edinburgh Senior:
m.c.erskine@sms.ed.ac.uk
Lisa Main, Edinburgh Junior:
s1104272@sms.ed.ac.uk

GLASGOW

Jamie McColl, Glasgow Senior:
0906208m@student.gla.ac.uk
Alex Andryzak, Glasgow Junior:
1103112a@student.gla.ac.uk

LIVERPOOL

Dan Cooper, Liverpool Senior:
hdcooper@liverpool.ac.uk

LONDON

Helena Diffey, London Senior:
hdiffey1@rvc.ac.uk

NOTTINGHAM

Will Bayton, Nottingham Senior:
will-bayton@hotmail.com

They eat horses don't they?

The news has been full of reports, articles and opinions about the discovery of horse DNA in our food. There has been a lot of embarrassment surrounding the furore, as there should be, but equally outrage and anger have ensued. Why is this?

The reason we don't eat horse meat in the UK is purely emotional. We're a nation of animal lovers, and just as we wouldn't even consider eating Fido, we don't want to think about eating Black Beauty. Our horses are our pets, and are a different entity to farm animals. Why have we chosen to love horses more than cows? Just because horses go faster when we sit on them, and might even jump over things if we're lucky, why does that mean we can eat one and not the other?

Concerns over welfare have been raised. The British public seem to believe that horses farmed in Europe for slaughter will have had terrible lives, living in cramped, stressed conditions where their animal rights were not considered. I struggle with this concept; not only does it suggest that every horse farm is the most inhospitable place on earth; it forgets that many chicken and pig farms have equally sentient animals living in cramped, stressed conditions. Surely, if we are more emotionally attached to the animal, our concerns over their welfare on those farms will be addressed more stringently. It could even have a knock-on effect to other farms!

Nutritional content is something that cannot be used as ammunition either. Horse meat has similar protein levels to beef, almost identical mineral content and is lower in fat to boot. In fact, some papers suggest that eating horse is beneficial to human health because of elevated levels of certain fatty acids.

As far as I can see, the true issue is the lack of knowledge. People quite rightly want to know what is in the food that they are eating. I agree – as vet students, we know the importance of clear communication, transparency and providing all necessary information. There are allergies and religious views to be considered and, as such, people need to know if their burger contains horse or pork, whether or not they are ethically opposed to eating it. Perhaps something to ponder before you hit the hay, though... Would there be equal uproar if my fish cakes had trout in them rather than salmon? No.

Certainly it's good that the issue has been raised and cogs have been put in motion for more transparency in the food chain, but it's not going to stop me buying Tesco burgers, and it certainly doesn't warrant 120 million results on a Google search.



Max

Max Foreman
javseditor@hotmail.com

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Active conservation discussed at the CUVZS symposium

By Jimmy Bost (5th Year – President, Cambridge University Veterinary Zoological Society)

‘In situ conservation – at home and abroad’ was the theme for this year’s Cambridge University Veterinary Zoological Society Symposium, held on January 18 and 19.

Around 80 delegates battled through some of the worst snow of the past two years (while the 35-ish Cambridge students, cycled through surprisingly largely snowless streets) to make it to Cambridge vet school. Lectures started at 9 am on Saturday, the first of nine that were presented over the course of the weekend, delivered by a variety of speakers on a huge range of topics that were based around the core theme.

The lectures included everything from a talk on the interdependence of people and elephants in Sri Lanka, given by Lalith Seneviratne, a Sri Lankan engineer, to ‘the diverse role of exotics vets in the UK’ by Matt Brash, the BVZS president. We were to hear more on the real story of how to become a zoo vet at Matt’s after-dinner speech on Saturday evening, following the delectable formal meal that was served to us at Pembroke College, one of Cambridge’s oldest and finest. I won’t spoil the story for those of you who weren’t fortunate enough to be there – you’ll have to track him down and ask him yourself – but let’s just say, sometimes things just work out!

On the ‘at home’ side we also had talks relating to badgers and red squirrels in the UK, as well as the importance of not introducing novel diseases through re-introduction programmes. Balancing this, on the ‘and abroad’ side, we heard about the plight of the Amur leopard and the difficulties of working with limited resources in far-flung parts of the



Examining bird seed samples in the nutrition practical

world, as well as the prioritisation of preserving genetic diversity in the ‘Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered’ (EDGE) programme. One of the most inspiring talks of the weekend was entitled ‘I’m not a zoo vet and I’m not on TV ... is my career over?’. The speaker’s long answer took us through experiences of travel and work with Asiatic black bears in China, bats and even bees, along with a good dose of climate change and the challenges mankind and the world face over the coming decades, to arrive at a resounding ‘no’ (or at least that’s what I concluded).

The practical sessions gave students a chance to explore anatomy and pathology in postmortem examination sessions; learn a great deal about the wide variety of wild and captive bird diets in a session on nutrition; and try their hand at imping feathers and flying Harris hawks in a birds of prey session.

To round off the weekend after a baked potato and chilli lunch (a new idea for this year, which seemed to be well-received), students were challenged and encouraged to put forward their own opinions and arguments in a debate on wildlife

rehabilitation organised by John and Margaret Cooper, who have long supported CUVZS.

After the weather-induced panic among the committee on Friday night, when we thought we wouldn’t actually get any delegates from other vet schools to come on the Saturday, it was all the more rewarding to discover that every vet school was represented (well done Stamos for being the sole Liverpool delegate). I think this speaks volumes about the commitment of ‘exotics’ vet students from across the UK and Ireland, for making the effort to get here through the snow and travel disruption (although maybe having spent money on a ticket in advance had something to do with it), and it makes me optimistic about the future of veterinary zoological societies across these isles.

As the end of my term as CUVZS president approaches, although it saddens me to report that this is to be the last year CUVZS or indeed any vet school VZS holds such an annual symposium, I look forward to the increased collaboration of the future, in which two zoological symposia will be organised each year between the societies in a



A delegate shows how to hold a Harris hawk in the birds of prey practical, which was run by your very own JAVS Editor, Max Foreman



Jimmy Bost kicks off the after-dinner speeches

rotating fashion, and I wish future VZS committees the best of luck with this!

The CUVZS committee would

like to thank – in no particular order – Bayer, Virbac, Dechra, Haith's, Vetronic, Exotics Made Easy, Flooved and Hill's Pet Nutrition for

sponsoring our symposium this year. Without their support it would not have been possible to put together such an impressive programme.

Sophie's ark – a celebration of species variation

By Sophie Boorman (2nd Year – Royal Veterinary College)

I recently watched a programme that has stayed with me, and which I think may be one of my favourite hour's entertainment ever, 'Attenborough's Ark'. In the programme, Sir David named 10 species that he would like to save from extinction; he outlined his reasons, and viewers saw beautiful footage of these species going about their daily lives.

For me, it was his personal list that made the programme so interesting: instead of popular, beautiful animals, such as a tiger; for example, he included the seemingly unremarkable northern quoll; instead of the internationally adored giant panda, he picked the Darwin's frog, a species probably unheard of by most.

The programme was about celebrating the diversity, complexity and hidden beauty of life. All animals have worth despite the price or value that humans place upon them. They all are part of the wonderfully diverse range of ecosystems in our planet; each creature has a part to play and they all rely upon each other.

The programme also highlighted the conservation efforts made by people around the world to save

these species – man may be the most destructive species on the planet, but is also the one that has the greatest capacity for empathy towards other species, and ultimately is the one with the most power to save them. 'With great power comes great responsibility' – yes, I'm quoting Spiderman, but it's certainly true in the case on conservation.

Anyway, as a tribute, I thought I'd chose five animals I would take on 'Sophie's Ark', and explain a little about them.



African lion

It's probably quite a conventional choice, but I had to include lions. They are my favourite animals, especially after my experience with them in 2011 when I volunteered at Antelope Park,

Zimbabwe. It is a lion rehabilitation centre that offered lots of hands-on experience, and these animals have become incredibly close to my heart. It is said to be difficult to estimate how many there are in the wild, but the figure is agreed to be under 35,000 in all of Africa, representing a 30 per cent decrease in the past 20 years. Their situation is approaching critical and, without positive action, the animal at the heart of Africa will soon become a creature limited to the taxidermy halls of museums.

Ground pangolin

The sunda pangolin is on Sir David's list, and I'm giving its African relative a place on my ark. This species of pangolin is less threatened than its Asian cousin, but is nevertheless extremely rare – natives can spend their entire lives in the bush and not see one. The only pangolin species in South Africa, these are nocturnal creatures that spend the nights hunting ants and termites, and the days sleeping curled up in a ball like a giant earthworm. As we were driving away from an exciting day in Hwange national park (the park of my African experience), full of joy at spotting a cheetah sauntering along the track, suddenly the truck screamed to a halt and our guide pointed excitedly at a little splodge on the side of the track. Yes, it was a pangolin. The sheer excitement in this man's voice got us all worked up, but it was only when reading about these curious creatures later that I truly appreciated how lucky we had been.

Pangolins are notoriously secretive, and only a very small amount is known about their behaviour in the wild, so we have to make presumptions based on captive individuals. It is thought that the mother pangolin will tend to her single baby until it is six months old, nursing it to four months and carrying it on the base of her tail. When threatened, she will wrap protectively around it, using her hard, artichoke-like scales to shield it from the outside world.

I would bring this special little creature onto my ark because it

would be fascinating to observe them, and the fierce protectiveness of the mother pangolin is surely something to treasure.

Glasswinged butterfly

Greta oto, the glasswinged butterfly, is found in South America; it is small, with a wingspan under 6 cm, but it is not its small size that makes it difficult to spot in the tropical rain-forest. It has transparent wings due to a lack of coloured scales, which make most species of butterflies so admired. It is a unique species and my ark would provide a brilliant opportunity to study this butterfly in detail.

Adults lay their eggs on the flowers of poisonous nightshade, and the caterpillars that hatch from these eggs ingest the nightshade and acquire toxic alkaloids making them undesirable to birds: a form of insect chemical warfare if you will. When they undergo metamorphosis they become silver, shining pupae, concealed in the vegetation like little mirrors in a theatre dressing room.

Once the young butterfly emerges from its cocoon, it will retain some of the toxic alkaloids, making the butterfly an unattractive meal even as an adult. This survival strategy is very impressive and an excellent metaphor for veterinary students: if you prepare yourself well in the early stages (ie, if you work hard at the beginning of the year) you will be rewarded later (even if you don't become a fascinating butterfly). If you want to see them for real, there are several in the butterfly house at London Zoo.

Macaya breast-spot frog

This critically endangered frog grows to be no bigger than the size of an adult thumb print; it is a tiny amphibian of intense, almost blood-red colour. It was thought to be extinct as one hadn't been seen since 2001, and appeared to be

yet another creature lost to the carelessness of man and his relentless destruction of habitat. However, in October 2010 the species was rediscovered living in a small area in Haiti; this frog is like the phoenix rising from the ashes and reappearing into the world 10 months after an earthquake devastated this tiny Caribbean country.

Over 93 per cent of Haiti's frogs are endangered. Over 30 per cent of the world's population of frogs face extinction. Frogs are part of the ecosystem – they have a place among all living things and though it is easy to say that a tiny frog living in

a remote corner of the globe has no importance, it represents a whole world that will disappear if it does. The secrets of the natural world remain largely hidden from science. Who knows, maybe this little

frog produces a secretion which could cure cancer? The more species like this that disappear without notice, the more empty and desolate our planet becomes. By protecting the habitat, we would save these frogs and benefit the people who depend upon it: as the frogs of the country disappear, so too will the

'These five species well represent the diversity of life that we have on our planet, and they all have an interesting story to tell. Who would you take on your ark?'



natural resources people depend upon for survival.

Two-toed sloth

The sloth has become my favourite animal at London Zoo, and is probably the reason I decided to write this article: as I was watching her sleep and then slowly wake up and look around, I felt a real fondness for this lethargic creature. It would be a cliché to say she raised her head 'sleepily' to take in the surroundings, but that seems to be the perfect descriptive word for sloths. These creatures like to take it easy. That said, when she had decided she'd had enough of her little pile of logs, she quickly and smoothly manoeuvred herself away.

Sloths have two long, curled claws on their front legs and three on the back, which are perfectly shaped to fit around the curved branches of the rainforest canopy. When they decide to expertly cross the canopy from one sleeping spot to another, they do so using abdominal strength that would make a yoga instructor green with envy.

Sloths have few, rather unconventional teeth, with which they eat shoots, fruits, nuts, berries and so on, which can take months to digest – digestion requires almost all of their energy resources to accomplish. I wanted this wonderful, easygoing animal in my ark because I think it is an example of the stark differences between what we as humans consider a good life, and what other species may consider living. To a sloth, life is sleeping and slowly eating, but how can we know what occupies its mind? Perhaps the sloth is a creature of great philosophical merit, endeavouring to work out the most perplexing conundrums as it sits in its rainforest home, chewing on its berries. We cannot know for sure.

So that is my ark. This is not to say that these are my favourite animals, but I think they well represent the diversity of life we have on our planet, and they all have an interesting story to tell. I highly recommend Attenborough's programme – who would you take on your ark?

Students for Animals in Need

By Katie Jamieson (3rd Year – Glasgow)



Students for Animals in Need (SAIN) was formed at Glasgow vet school after a case arrived at our equine hospital from the charity Riding for the Disabled.

The horse had a keratoma and the charity's funds were insufficient to treat this much-loved horse, so it was faced with a seemingly unavoidable option of euthanasia. However, as this was a special case, the clinicians agreed to perform the lifesaving operation at cost price, allowing the charity to keep the horse. Students at the time started to think – wouldn't it be good to have a charity set up to deal with this kind of situation?

With this in mind, the founding members of SAIN received permission from the university's animal hospitals, and with the clinicians on board the ball started rolling for SAIN to agree criteria that cases had to meet to be considered for funding.

The group formed a committee, which is responsible for fundraising and considering cases that the char-

ity should help. SAIN also receive 10 per cent of the profit from our student body GUVMA.

What has SAIN done so far?

To date, SAIN has helped two cases through the Small Animal Hospital. First, a puppy that had an intussusception secondary to a foreign body. Thanks to the funding provided, she was able to have the surgery and is now doing well. Secondly, we helped a young dog that needed extrahepatic portosystemic shunt ligation surgery.

The future for SAIN

With continued fundraising and donations we hope to be able to treat more needy animals coming through Glasgow vet school.

SAIN also needs you! SAIN is looking to broaden its horizons and branch out to other vet schools where students may wish to set up similar charities to help animals in need.

SAIN's committee has written a guide on how get started; to learn more, e-mail the committee at: glasgowgain@gmail.com

Veterinary students as global citizens

By Antonia Milner and Lauren Hamstead (2nd Year and 3rd Year – RVC)

On November 27, 2012, at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), vet students were treated to a symposium to remember. In particular, the participation of Professor Lord Trees, past president of the RCVS, caused immense excitement among the students. With an audience of medical and veterinary professionals, and students from four UK vet schools, every speaker seemed to inspire and captivate.

Lord Trees gave the first lecture, discussing the increasing importance of including the global perspective in undergraduate veterinary education. He explained that this was important with regard to training students to contribute to global animal health, but crucially also in terms of future human health and food security. He also informed the audience of the selection process involved in joining the House of Lords, emphasising that his career experience was not just an aid in advancing veterinary medicine, but also more widely, allowing him to help make an impact across a far greater spectrum.

The 'Students as Global Citizens' project, a three-year collaborative initiative involving the RVC, the Institute of Education, University College London Medical School, University College London School of Pharmacy and the London International Development Centre was presented by Nick Short, a lecturer at RVC, and Nicole Blum, lecturer at the Institute of Education. The focus of the project has been the importance of including global health and international development in the undergraduate syl-

labus for medical, pharmacy and veterinary students. The speakers introduced the successes of the project, including novel interdisciplinary teaching, and also reviewed difficulties encountered. These included the immense pressures on timetabling, and the perception of the relevance of global health to training and professional development. Jenny Maud and Beverley Panto, recent veterinary graduates, followed. They described how relevant global health education has already been to their own experience, and how global trends impact heavily on UK veterinary practice. The final lecture of the first session was given by Jonathon Meldrum, the national director of Medsin – a global health charity run by medical students. He encouraged veterinary students to become involved with Medsin, and discussed the impact students can have on global health.

The second session aimed to increase awareness of the different fields involved with global health from a veterinary, medical and pharmacological perspective. Particularly awe inspiring was Anthony Costello, director of the Institute of Global Health at UCL, who presented details of the effectiveness of women's groups in Nepal, Pakistan and India at reducing infant mortality and maternal mortality by at least 25 per cent, just by encouraging women to talk. This simple but highly effective idea demonstrated not only the importance of understanding different cultures and human nature; it also illustrated how solutions can be cheap yet effective. It also helped to show how much one person can achieve on a global forum, with the other lecturers' achievements speaking for themselves. Richard Kock, professor of wildlife health

and infectious diseases at the RVC discussed 'one health' and the inter-relationship between environmental, animal and human health from the veterinary perspective.

The pharmacy perspective was given by Felicity Smith, professor of pharmacy practice at UCL's School of Pharmacy, who emphasised the importance of including global health in the syllabus for all three subjects and encouraging students to consider the area further in their careers. The closing remarks were given by the Peter Roeder OBE, who played a key role in the eradication of rinderpest. He discussed the importance of veterinary intervention in medical global health topics and the politics involved in veterinary medicine, commenting particularly on the comparisons between the position of the vet in the French government in comparison to the English.

The symposium gave an in-depth insight into the real opportunities and possibilities of where global health can lead, and this, combined with charismatic speakers and biscuits, made it an enormous success.

Those involved in the Students as Global Citizens project are keen to hear from students who are interested in global veterinary medicine and development, and might like to explore novel ways of including these topics in education. You can find out more about the project, including recordings of the symposium, the project publication, and a comprehensive guide to undertaking EMS overseas, on the project website at www.rvc.ac.uk/global. For more information you can also contact Jenny Maud (jmaud@rvc.ac.uk) or Nick Short (nshort@rvc.ac.uk).

Partly inspired by the enthusiasm generated at the symposium, students at the RVC have started

a student public health and epidemiology discussion group. This is a student-led initiative, with members suggesting topics or speakers for events. The main aim of the group is to interest students in current epidemiology research taking place both within RVC and beyond. Rather than being an extension of lectures, the sessions are planned with a short introductory presentation from our facilitator followed by an informal discussion around the topic. Hopefully, this will allow students to develop opinions on different topics and gain a better understanding of a vet's role in epidemiology and public health.

To avoid students having to travel between the RVC's two campuses to attend events, we intend to use conferencing software that will allow students in both locations to take part in the discussion. Having established this link, it should be possible for student



Lord Trees emphasises the importance of taking a global perspective

groups from other vet schools to also take part in the discussion. This would be a good way to get to know people from other vet schools and have different sugges-

tions for discussion topics – so watch this space! If you would like more information on this group, please contact Lauren Hamstead (lhamstead@rvc.ac.uk).



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AVS in action

By Nic Wojciechowski (AVS President, 4th Year – Edinburgh)

Sometimes it easy to forget that the AVS is here for more than Sports Weekend and Congress, so here's a quick review of just some of the things your reps are working on to represent vet students across the UK and Ireland.

A big part of the work of the AVS is aimed at sharing the experiences and problems encountered at each university, so that we can improve the daily lives of vet students. By comparing the good and bad, and helping to find solutions to problems that may have already been dealt with by other vet schools, we are striving for equal opportunities and experiences nationally. Recently, issues have ranged from naked calendars and parking permits to yoga classes and radiation safety.

Many of the welfare events that you will have seen at your own university, whether or not under the AVS's name, have been set in motion with ideas and encouragement from the AVS welfare subcommittee. We have also built relations with the Veterinary Benevolent Fund and Animal Welfare Foundation, in an attempt to get more talks to you and improve your vet student experience.

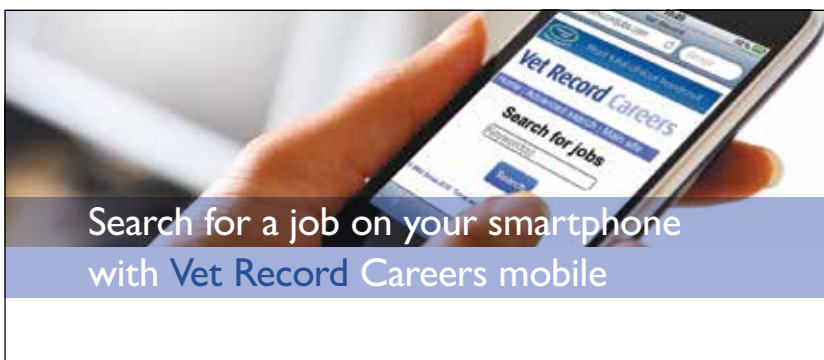



A constant source of debate for us is EMS. We are still working on the issue of the cost of EMS, and in the past four months the topic of EMS placements requesting payment for taking on students has arisen. This may be an unavoidable change, but we're doing everything we can to make the student opinion known, and ensure students do not suffer because of it. On top of this we are now looking into health and safety during EMS, particularly while on farm placements, to see if we are given enough advice and awareness to avoid dangerous situ-

ations. With this in mind, the BVA has recently updated its online EMS guides for students and practitioners and has asked for input from the AVS.

Regular meetings are held between AVS officers and BVA and RCVS groups to ensure that students' concerns are heard at the top of the ladder. With the advent of the new vet school at Surrey, it has become more important than ever to have these links available so that a two-way communication is open to us.

This is only a snapshot of some of the highlights – excluding Sports Weekend and Congress – and the effort put into the AVS by your reps and the rest of the committee. Remember that we need your input to pass on the messages to the powers-that-be, and instigate change. If you have pressing issues or concerns, don't hesitate to contact your vet school reps, or use the website (www.avs-uk.org.uk), Facebook group (www.facebook.com/AVS.UK.Ireland), Twitter (@AVS_UK_Ireland) or the BVA's student forum (www.bva.co.uk/community) to get your opinions out there. Similarly, more details on the current projects being worked on by the AVS can be gleaned by talking to your friendly AVS reps.





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New UK vet school

By Chris Ogden (Senior Vice-President – Final-Year, Nottingham)

The following letter was published in *Veterinary Record* at the end of last year. AVS consulted with students from every vet school to ensure that fair student opinion was given. It's another thing that AVS does on your behalf.

Dear Editor,

I AM writing following the recent media coverage of the announcement of a new veterinary school which is being set up at the University of Surrey, with its first intake of students being in 2014.

The Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) is a national student association, and 'the voice' of veterinary students in the UK and Ireland. The AVS has consulted widely with veterinary students in the UK and Ireland via its committee and school representatives, student-led discussion forums and the BVA community forum, where many students are coming forward to give their opinions.

It is clearly a controversial and a very emotive discussion topic based on the responses that we collected from our members and it is one that has a direct effect on veterinary students and new graduates

The AVS has acknowledged that the general consensus among the student body is that there is no demand for more veterinary graduates and the profession does not need a new veterinary school in the current climate. Although there will no doubt be enough applicants to the veterinary course to fill another veterinary school, the student body has concerns that there will not be enough veterinary jobs for new graduates to support the increase in 2019 when the first cohort of Surrey veterinary students graduate.

The AVS is a specialist division of the BVA and both associations have worked closely together on

this topic. The University of Surrey has done little to consult the veterinary profession, with both the BVA and AVS only being notified after the general press release from the university. Statements made publicly by the BVA about the proposed vet school can be found on its website (www.bva.co.uk/education) and the debate is still live on the BVA community forum.

It could be considered that a new veterinary school and the teaching curriculum will provide a fresh and innovative approach to the way that veterinary students are taught and this may improve the standard of veterinary teaching. However, there is a risk that it could mean there are not sufficient numbers of suitably qualified senior academics, clinicians, researchers, funding grants and resources, leading to a dilution of the current high standard of teaching and course provision in the UK and Ireland. The AVS seeks to be assured that this will not be the case.

Additionally, it is possible that with the new veterinary school comes a change in attitudes of new graduates, opening up access to areas of the profession other than clinical practice and exploring more diverse career opportunities. It would be favourable if there were more veterinary graduates in other areas of the profession, for example veterinary public health, but it is often not what applicants applying to the course have in mind and not commonly appealing to the new graduate. It will be interesting to observe how the University of Surrey applies the emphasis on 'One Health' to the veterinary course, and if its applicants understand the different focus; that's assuming that it would be so different from other courses in the existing schools where the One Health concept is already on the curriculum.

Extramural studies (EMS) is a compulsory component of the veterinary course and students are

required to complete 12 weeks of preclinical and 26 weeks of clinical EMS placement. Clinical EMS is provided by veterinary practices themselves, and so an increase in the number of students completing EMS will increase the strain on the veterinary practices providing the placements which, in many cases, are already oversubscribed with full EMS diaries months in advance. Will EMS be sustainable with an increase in the number of students needing to complete their EMS requirement?

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the particular impact the new veterinary school will have on students living in and around Surrey and students at the Royal Veterinary College. In the plans for the new veterinary course, there will not be a veterinary teaching hospital and local veterinary practices and hospitals will be used to provide the final-year rotations, so these practices and hospitals will no longer be EMS providers to students at other universities. Although this distributed model of veterinary teaching in which core course content is taught by university-employed lecturers at independent veterinary practices has been used before, it is more of a concern with another large veterinary school in close proximity.

In 2014 there will be the first intake of veterinary students at the University of Surrey. What is more concerning, though, is that it has become clear just how easy it now is to set up a new veterinary school and there is nothing to prevent other universities doing the same. On the advent of the new veterinary school and the distributed model becoming more popular, negating the need for an on-site hospital, it is a serious worry that vet schools could start up in other universities all over the country. What can be done by the profession to ensure there is not a surplus of UK veterinary graduates?

Another serious concern is the

increasing amount of student debt that veterinary students accrue and have to bear during their early careers. If there are not enough veterinary jobs for the number of new graduates every year, a worrying potential outcome of this could be a high attrition rate of members leaving the profession and a decrease in

the number of high-achieving school students opting for a career in veterinary medicine as it becomes a less economically viable option.

In summary, the main concern for students is over the uncertainty of the job market and the impact more students in the UK and Ireland will have on EMS provision. The AVS will

continue to represent its members' views as we work with the BVA on this important topic.

Chris Ogden
AVS President 2012/13

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AVS congress 2013

By Matt Erskine (3rd Year – Edinburgh, Senior Rep)

As AVS Congress was about to start, the organising committee watched nervously as the steady snowfall that had plagued Edinburgh all week turned to a blizzard. They feared the snow would prevent people from coming, and of special concern was that the guest speaker opening the congress – TV Vet Steve Leonard – wouldn't make it either.

Their fears turned out to be unfounded, and it was soon time to get the congress under way with the traditional pub crawl, which began in the cramped setting of the adopted 'vet pub', the Ale House. With fierce competition for space, the night began with most people downing their drinks and moving on to the next pub. Luckily, for the less accustomed to rapid drinking, the night continued at a more leisurely pace and we gradually walked, then stumbled, then fell into the remaining pubs en route, with everyone in good spirits and problems for the committee at a minimum. The night ended in Cabaret Voltaire where the few left standing and not concerned about the 8 am bus pick up time continued to party into the early hours, fuelled by good banter.

Saturday morning began with a groan for some, as Friday night took

its toll, but the bacon rolls effected a good recovery and they were soon on their way to the beginning of what was to be a cracker of a congress. The day began with a short introduction from Susan Rhind, the Dick Vet's head of teaching, before she handed over to the star of the show, Steve Leonard. The next hour was filled with hilarious anecdotes, debunking of commonly held beliefs and a great sense of optimism as Steve laid the amazing world of veterinary medicine before us.

The practical sessions that were held on Saturday ranged from clinical skills and ultrasound to working through ethical dilemmas and getting hands-on in the farm animal hospital. The lectures were equally varied, covering topics including the soft skills needed to be a vet, badger culling, early neutering in cats and ataxia in horses. Throughout the day the careers 'fayre' was also running giving students a chance to look at the different career paths available to them, and to find out more about the BVA, as well as the specialist branches of the profession such as the Camelid Veterinary Society, the Sheep Veterinary Society, and the British Cattle Veterinary Association. The Royal Army Veterinary Corps was represented and there were also stands from many of the major veterinary pharmaceutical companies as well as some of the larger veterinary employers, such as the PDSA.

Saturday also featured the AVS AGM, where reports of the committee's progress this year were given to the assembled masses. Plans and targets for the upcoming year were outlined, and nominations for AVS committee elections were made.

With the success of all the events during the day, the Saturday night had a lot to live up to. Thanks to the hard work of the congress committee, it did just that! The evening began with a champagne reception in the John Macintyre Conference Centre before everyone headed through to sit at their tables (named after Scottish Lochs, naturally). The meal took us through an indulgent five courses of Scottish cuisine. During



Steve Leonard



The ceilidh in full swing

the meal a number of speeches were made – with speakers including the AVS President Chris Ogden, and the AVS Junior Vice-President Nic Wojciechowski, who formally received the AVS insignia marking his transition to AVS President. This was followed by thanks to the current AVS Senior Reps and, most notably, Katie Meacher, Edinburgh Senior, for putting on such a fantastic AVS Congress.

The BVA President, Peter Jones, then continued the speeches in style with his baseball cap turned

back to front and a 'rap of thanks' that was indescribably good. The ball was closed in the traditional Scottish way, with a ceilidh. Despite the majority having little clue as to where to put their feet (or any other body part) for the dances, much to the amusement of our Scottish students, everyone had a great time. After such a hectic day you would think most people would be ready for bed, but in true vet style the party continued on to the early hours at the Student Union.

There was mild relief as buses on Sunday did not come until 9 am, giving the suffering some much needed sleep. Sunday was once again filled with lectures, varying from health care of backyard chickens to equine dysphagia. Practicals for Sunday included sheep handling and rabbit dentistry to name but two. The congress finally ended on Sunday afternoon with the committee members feeling they needed a well-deserved rest, but happy in the knowledge that everyone had had a brilliant time.



The BVA president, Peter Harlech Jones, discusses the role of the BVA



Ultrasound in cattle was one of the hands-on practical sessions at AVS Congress

An equine emergency

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

The mare stumbled through the open doors into the clinic, trembling, balancing her weight on one hind leg at a time.

The vets started a work up: TPR, catheter, blood tests, stomach tube. She whines, starts backing up, she's losing her strength. She leans against the wall, staining the white panels brown with mud; her foal is at home, 13 minutes away from being an orphan.

The mare is as swollen as a summer tick, her belly distended. They think her intestine is twisted. Her threshold for pain seems to be decreasing, and her prognosis dims. The surgeon rushes, time is against him. He hates to cut colics, but goes on with it anyhow.

'Walk her in,' the surgeon says, 'let's go.' She makes three steps before she falls. The world clatters. She's frantic. She thrashes, and I am sure her legs are going to break on the concrete floor. She goes stiff, trembling, her legs extended in front of her; the weight of her body crushing down on that gut. 'Get up mare,'

we scream, 'up, up', our hands slap her hind as a last resort incentive. Come back to us, I think, come back to this earth.

She rises. She kicks and rolls, and pushes her body up. We are dirty and sweaty and united in our relief, until she goes down again two steps later: She falls harder this time; her skull cracks the floor. She twists and screams. The surgeon grabs her lead rope to hold her head up; her legs kick and crash.

'Sedation,' they shout and hit the jugular effortlessly, pulling back blood into the plastic tube before it disappears inside her. We step back, we wait for the mare to settle and relax. It's too late though, because we have just witnessed that moment where you watch the eyes of a living thing lose its life, and the life passes right out of them. We don't have to check for the heart rate but we do, to assure the devastated owner that she is gone. We all know; there's nothing in her eyes.

Her body twitches and spasms; it works out the last few involuntary reflexes. 'No more pain, Mama,' someone whispers. We close her

eyelids. We fill syringes of euthanasia solution. This is not wholly necessary, because she is not here, but we do it for her owner.

'My girl,' he says. 'Can I have a minute with her?' We back away; I reset the catheter supplies. We occupy ourselves elsewhere, fabricating a private moment in the middle of a hospital with nine onlookers. We wash our hands and change our scrubs and reset the colic cart . . . another surgery is on its way.

'\$40,000. I've won with this mare,' he says, his voice cracking. He does not mean to be crass; I believe it's the only way he knows how to quantify the love – to show us that she would have been worth it.

They're all worth it – always – every single one: from the rescue pony to the \$200,000 dressage queen.

We converge in the nurses' station, sharing distractions and jokes. We have to, because if you don't, it changes you – you go home fundamentally fractured. Sometimes the wins are few and far between, but that doesn't mean it's not worth every second.

■ *The 'opinion' section in JAVS is a place to share your thoughts on issues of interest. Please note that the opinions expressed by individual students may not reflect the official position of the AVS or the BVA.*

Ban the ban

By Jordan Sinclair (1st Year, Glasgow)

The Hunting Act 2004 was passed to outlaw hunting with dogs in England and Wales. (The ban came into effect two years earlier in Scotland and hunting remains legal in Northern Ireland.) While it particularly applies to fox hunting, the Act also covers the hunting of mink, deer and hares.

On Boxing Day this year, I sat on my horse in the village square of Market Bosworth among 80 other riders for the traditional festive meet. Hunts up and down the country continue today (within the law), making the most of the loopholes in the bill. The Countryside Alliance says: 'The Act makes it an offence to hunt a mouse with a dog but not a rat, you can legally hunt a rabbit but not a hare. You can flush a fox to guns with

two dogs legally but if you use three it's an offence. You can flush a fox to a bird of prey with as many dogs as you like.'

It's all very well discussing the pros and cons of fox hunting from the outside, but how many 'antis' or even hunt supporters have actually sat on a horse and been part of it? I was 13 on my first hunt, and terrified. It used to be traditional to smear the fox's blood on the face of any newcomers if one was caught on their first hunt. I soon realised that there was nothing to worry about: seven seasons later, I haven't seen so much as the tail of a fox.

There's truth behind the term 'sly fox'. They are intelligent animals, and keep themselves well concealed from the hounds and huntsmen. I'm not saying that hunts never catch a fox, but when they do, it's usually already maimed or diseased. In which case, it's beneficial to the wild fox population to be rid of it.

A fine balance needs to be struck between the need to hunt foxes (with dogs or using other methods), humane killing, and the welfare of those that remain alive.

Where does the veterinary profession stand on the issue of fox hunting? Some say that we should be thoroughly anti-hunting due to the welfare of the foxes. Others argue there is a welfare issue around farm animals being preyed on by foxes.

But it's not as black-and-white as that. If I had never been hunting, I'm not sure where I would stand on the issue. However, whether I have or have not galloped across fields and jumped over hedges as part of the pursuit does not change the fact that I've known foxes to eat live piglets from our family's farm, in addition to their habit of chicken sniping. But do we need to hunt them specifically with dogs? I believe that proposed 'more humane methods' are not as fox-friendly as you might think. When lamping, the gunmen aim for the body of the fox because the head is too small a target, resulting in a large number of wounded but not dead foxes. The foxes probably die later from their wounds,

hence making lamping likely to result in a slower, more painful death. Cage trapping, while seemingly better due to the eventual 'quick' death when the cage is opened, causes the fox distress at being trapped in a small space.

I feel that hunting with dogs strikes the balance as well as any method; healthy foxes are too clever to let themselves be eradicated by a bunch of hounds and their entourage of heavy-footed horses making a racket. If the few that do get caught aren't enough to control the countryside problem, then what is the likelihood that alternative methods alone would be?

I hunt, not because I'm blood-

thirsty or seeking revenge for our livestock, but because I enjoy it. And so do the horses. I'll never forget the way that, one Boxing Day, faced with a hedge bigger than anything we had ever jumped before, my 14.2 hh pony leapt over it with me hanging on for dear life. Being the stubborn mare that she was, I knew at that moment that she loved it as much as I did. Aside from the adrenaline rush, hunts are a great way of meeting other horse-lovers or catching up with friends from the equestrian world. Personally, I think that you can argue until you're blue in the face, but while hunting remains such a social event, no bill or law will ever stop it completely.

The perfect career

By Ashley Forti (3rd Year, Glasgow)

I have found myself in a predicament. Not only am I indecisive as to which field of veterinary medicine I want to specialise in, but I am struggling to weigh up the pros and cons of many other options . . . should I embark on an internship or go straight into practice; do a residency in surgery or internal medicine; exotics or small animal medicine? What about mixed practice? Shall I do day practice or emergency and critical care; work in a large hospital or a small private clinic? Work for someone else or start my own business? Stay in Scotland or go back to Chicago? Or set up shop in . . . Canada? And what about my loans? These are just a few of the very big and important questions that eventually we will all have to answer.

In September last year, I was thinking about this very issue, and at the time



I had said to myself, 'At least I'm only a third year . . . I have plenty of time to make up my mind.' However, our final-year curriculum is changing, and I've just found out that I have to choose my final-year specialty tracks by the end of May. It's a terrifying, yet exciting, thought. It makes the finish line feel so much closer, yet it's kind of scary at the same time. I really feel a lot of pressure to make such an important decision so soon, when we haven't really had much

clinical experience. It makes it all feel so real. My main problem is that I don't know exactly what I want to do; I have ideas, but I don't know for sure. I actually envy those who say, 'Yep. Large animal medicine. That's it for me. I will be happy doing that for the rest of my life.' It must be nice to feel so confident in your choice, and to focus on what you really want to do. Unfortunately, from what I've heard, the number of students in my class who have actually made up their minds and are 100 per cent positive that they have made the right choice is pretty small.

For now, my ideal career is not entirely realistic: I want to own a big, beautiful, modern, shiny new, state-of-the-art practice without any of the heavy burdens that go with owning your own business.

I want the nicest and newest equipment, and top-notch staff, with a zero tolerance policy for drama.

I want to be able to offer the lowest prices in a 60-mile radius, but still be very profitable. I want to be a board certified surgeon and internal medicine specialist.

I want to work on horses, dogs, reptiles, amphibians and fish without losing a ton of multi-pet-owning clients that have to take their cats/birds/small furrries elsewhere.

I want my clinic to be a day practice with a 24/7/365 emergency service, as well as a referral centre with every specialist there is.

I want to be working side-by-side with happy vets, happy technicians, and happy assistants to ensure that our patients get the best possible care, and that we also make our clients happy.

I want my clinic to be the place where everyone wants to work, and I want all of this with no hassle and a big enough salary to easily pay off my \$200,000+ US Government loans.

I could go on and on about what I want in my ideal practice, but as anyone can see, it is a completely unrealistic and fantastical idea, which could only occur in my dreams. I'm only one woman and I sure as heck don't have any super powers. To a lot of people, this sounds



like a nightmare, but it's my fantasy and I almost certainly can't have it. I already know that a compromise needs to be made... but where do I start? How do I choose what things are most important? I want to be sure that I am content with my final decision and that I have no regrets.

All I can do now is to try to get as much clinical experience in every type of clinic that I find interesting while I am still in vet school, and see what I like best and where I fit in, and where I can see myself working in two-and-a-half years time. Plus, there's always a chance to get more experience in different fields after graduation – doing an internship at an exotics practice and being taught by a mentor; for example. I suppose for the internships/residencies I will just have to wait and see what opportunities arise.

Obviously I wouldn't dream of starting my own clinic straight out of vet school, but maybe someday that will be on the cards for me. I know the clinic I described doesn't exist so my hopes aren't set particularly high. Nothing will ever be perfect, and I will always have to deal with difficult, angry and annoying clients (and patients), and I will have to live pretty frugally for the first few years to fit the loan repayments into my budget (if only veterinarians got paid as much as doctors).

In reality, there are many outcomes that I can see working out for me, and which will hopefully make me a satisfied veterinarian. I can only hope and pray that I will be fortunate enough to be doing what I love to do every day, surrounded by great people and in a practice that I love.

There is definitely one very special thing about veterinary medicine that is unlike many other careers out there, and that is its wide variety of career choices and nearly infinite possibilities. In a sense, the not knowing aspect is what keeps things interesting. I shouldn't be scared of what the future brings, because even if I do pick the wrong track for my final year, it's not the end of my career; and it most definitely isn't the end of the world. I have so many paths I can follow when I graduate... whether I end up in a clinic, doing research, teaching, specialising, working for the AVMA, VMD, a pharmaceutical company, Idexx, Antech, WHO, Defra, etc. The options are endless, and everyone who crosses the finish line with me will find their own niche in the veterinary medical field; it's just a matter of time and willingness to seek out and fight for the opportunities to tackle your endeavours.



Diversity and change in the profession

By Alex McGhee (Junior Vice-President – 2nd Year, Bristol)

I'm not sure whether anyone's noticed, but the current crop of vet students in the UK is anything but diverse. Vet schools have been grappling for years with the issue of diversity. Opinions differ as to why vet schools struggle; however, some reasons are unavoidable and understandable – pet ownership is lower in most ethnic minorities, while having either a farming or equestrian background increases the likelihood of you being middleclass.

With vet schools requiring students to have a large quantity and variety of work experience before applying, jumping through these hoops is greatly aided by supportive parents, car ownership and not having a second job. There's also an argument that the level of organisation and diligence required to get in doesn't lend itself to teenage boys. Have animals and the veterinary profession been over-sentimentalised by the media?

Whatever the cause, we will qualify in a profession rapidly becoming dominated by middleclass white girls. Now I want to make something very clear; middleclass white girls make excellent vets. But any profession is at its healthiest with a representative split of ethnicity, socioeconomic status and gender.

It's very easy, when considering the massive skew in demographics that the profession is going through, to head for the classic clichéd problems. The favourite among these is that girls are not strong enough to be farm vets, and that the profession as we know it is going to collapse beneath our feet because of a lack of cow-wrestling brutes. If you speak to a large animal clinician, though,

they'll swear blind it is technique and not strength that is the key to good farm practice. Couple that with the fact that there are plenty of girls in vet school that I wouldn't take on in an arm wrestling contest, and I think we are going to be fine! The second generalisation is that 'all these girls want to do is to work with small animals', which is also not true. In fact small animal practice is the most under-represented in the ambition of first year vet students.

Not all of the stereotypes people have of female vets are negative. A thoroughly charmless farmer's wife once told me categorically that women make better vets. She looked me square in the eye and said that while men are stronger, women are more conscientious and responsible.

So what effect, if any, will the increasing proportion of women in the veterinary profession have? I don't think the apocalyptic scenes painted by grey-haired partners of a uterine time bomb for the profession will come to pass. That said, even those with most basic knowledge of physiology, such as myself, know that women are more likely to give birth to children than their male colleagues!

The other big change that may be in store for us future vets is the increase in the number of graduates. The last addition to the veterinary university family was Nottingham. This was done with extensive consultation with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and in response to a need for more vet graduates. If the students and PR are to be believed, Nottingham has revolutionised the way vets are educated. In truth, while veterinary and medical education has flip-flopped between system- and subject-based teaching for decades and the (albeit tortuously slow) move to a more practically-based course existed



long before Nottingham, the real innovation was the idea that a vet school could exist without its own veterinary hospital. This is a legacy that the veterinary profession and new graduates in particular may come to regret. Now any aspiring university can establish a vet school with nothing more than some labs and lecture theatres. What's more, the RCVS has a constitutional obligation to give a stamp of approval to any and all vet schools that meet the required standards. The new vet school at Surrey is the first to follow this pattern, but it may not be the last.

So what lies ahead for us as we are thrust in to the real world? Is there going to come a day when the entire veterinary profession simply packs up their handbags and goes home to start baking scones and look after the children? Will hoards of vet students congregate outside practices, surviving on the odd discarded hamster while waiting for a precious job? Well, probably not, but the profession that we will enter is changing fast, and it has to be asked whether the profession, namely the RCVS, the BVA and AVS can take greater control of our futures.

Should I be a vegetarian?

By Ben Simpson (4th Year, Cambridge)

It seems to me, as a vet student, that everyone has a set of questions to ask every time they encounter a vet. Top of the list and a time-old favourite for small talk in consultation rooms is: 'Isn't it supposed to take longer to become a vet than a doctor?'. This is closely followed, in second place, by the classic: 'Isn't it harder to be a vet than a doctor, because you have to know about lots of different animals while doctors just have to know about people?'.

Rather less commonly, I am asked whether I am a vegetarian. Should I be a vegetarian? Until fairly recently I hadn't really considered the impact of the animal products that I consume, and what motivates me to eat meat. Certainly, before university, I hadn't given much thought to this, and so it seems to be mainly a consequence of the exposure a veterinary course has given me to the livestock industry that has called my eating habits into question.

On the whole, the majority of the general public is blissfully ignorant of the provenance of the animal products they consume. It is only through spending time on farms on EMS (having grown up in suburban London) that I have been confronted by the source of the food that ends up on my plate.

The meat I eat in a chicken kiev, covered in breadcrumbs and infused with garlicky butter, is an object completely separated in my mind from a living animal. It comes neatly and conveniently packaged from a supermarket and not from a farm. The link struck me in a nauseating manner during a preclinical EMS placement: eating a pork pie one evening, I discovered that it tasted far too similar to the rich aroma of

pig farm that seemed to permeate my clothes and my skin.

The public perception of the vet seems to be a rather naive view and doesn't clearly reflect the dichotomy seen in veterinary practice between small animal (and equine) practice and farm animal practice. The primary role of the farm animal vet is to maximise productivity through prevention and control of disease and optimisation of management and nutrition – arguably an entirely human-motivated *raison d'être*. Mending sick farm animals is obviously a key role of the farm vet, but it is mostly out of economic concern. In comparison, small animal practice seeks to optimise the health of animals for the animals (albeit with some vested interest of the owner) in a situation much more akin to human medicine.

Animal welfare

Animal welfare is an increasingly important consideration for farmers and is a key role of the veterinarian, but primarily to make the existence of animals on farms more comfortable – essentially making the best out of a bad situation. Ultimately, farming will never fully fulfil the welfare needs of an animal, even in production systems with the best intentions, as an animal is never going to be able to fully express its entire spectrum of natural behaviours and live a natural life. The overriding aim of producing meat in an economical manner means maintaining good welfare can be prioritised, but is never the primary focus.

I have often justified my consumption of meat to myself by the fact that man has evolved eating meat: it

is what we are supposed to eat. But I no longer march into the wilderness, spear in hand, to hunt down wild beasts to drag home and roast over an open fire. My 'wild beasts' come ready-caught, ready-killed and ready-prepared, vacuum-packed in plastic packaging with full cooking instructions. What was

once part of Darwin's game of survival of the fittest, with my potential dinner having its chance to escape from my clutches, has turned into a game of shooting fish in a barrel.

Paradox

Why do I still consume meat and other animal products in this knowledge? I guess the only reasons are purely selfish: I have always done so, and I like the taste. Being selective and choosing the more welfare-friendly option where possible when shopping is in some ways soothing to the conscience, but ultimately buying animal products at the supermarket is a gamble, and as a consumer, one can never be sure exactly how they have been produced. Although as future vets we must remain emotionally detached in times of emergency and client distress, in small animal practice it is hard to deny that we invest a great deal of emotion into dogs and cats. Accepting farmed livestock also as sentient beings creates difficulties; to invest a lot of feeling into them only to subsequently kill them for our dinner seems paradoxical, not least psychologically draining. Should a vet be vegetarian? Not necessarily. But it doesn't surprise me that many vets are, and I believe more of the general public would be given better awareness of food production.

'Welfare is an increasingly important consideration for farmers and is a key role of the veterinarian, but primarily to make the existence of animals on farms more comfortable.'

Rhinos under siege

By Annette Vindenes (4th Year, Glasgow)

My last day in South Africa ended treating a rhino with an abscess. She was darted from a helicopter while running with two other grown rhinos and a calf about 8 months old. I was leading the truck as instructed by the helicopter and saw the rhinos running over the open ground. I can't explain the feeling of awe looking at these magnificent creatures. We were just 20 metres away from full grown rhinos with horns. Unfortunately, it's not often you see them with horns anymore, because of poaching.

The facts about rhinos killed in southern Africa are shocking. In 2009, 122 were killed; in 2010, 333 were killed; and in 2011 a total of 705 were killed. In 2012, 281 had been killed by the end of July and that number was expected to reach 595 by the end of the year.

No proof has been found that rhino horns (ground to powder) have aphrodisiac qualities, as is believed in some traditional medicines. A politician in Vietnam featured in a television campaign saying that rhino horn cured his cancer. Others believe that the horn can reduce inflammation, fever and hangovers. In Yemen, the horns are used as handles for daggers. The fact that rhino horn is illegal and rare only causes the prices on the black market to rocket. A 2 kg rhino horn can sell for 2 million South African rand (£150,000). Coupled with the low minimum wage in southern Africa, this makes poaching an alternative some choose to supplement their income. A grown rhino can have horns weighing up to 6 kg.

There are also reported to be problems within the game industry.

In a recent trial, a game farmer and two vets were charged in connection with poaching. The cost of a rhino is a fraction of what you can get for its horn, so some game farmers might be tempted to hunt their own rhinos for their horns. I asked a farmer who said that the cost of a rhino could be around R240,000, while its horn is worth several million rand. I find it horrible to think that vets who are there to look out for the welfare of such animals, might be in on this. It doesn't help the public's trust in the many vets who actually do good.

On top of the obvious, there are additional welfare implications. Poachers don't always know how to properly kill the rhinos when they shoot them, leaving them with fatal wounds. They will not hesitate to start dehorning the animal while it's still alive. I heard that poachers will shoot a calf as well if there is one. The calves do not have horns, but because they often stay with their mother, the poachers are afraid of them.

I heard how the vet I worked with had been called out when a female rhino had been poached. The calf was found next to her alive, but it became ill soon afterwards. The vet found that the calf had been shot too, but in a place that wasn't visible. The wound had penetrated the chest cavity next to the right shoulder, which punctured the lung and diaphragm; the calf died a few days later.

Prevention

I'll write about some of the good things that the vets do to prevent poaching.

Some farmers choose to dehorn their rhinos to prevent the animals being killed by poachers. If the rhinos don't have any horns, there is no reason for them to be killed. This is achieved by a team effort; a vet darts the animal from a helicopter;

then monitors its anaesthetic safely, while a chainsaw is used to remove the two horns. Care has to be taken not to cut too deeply, because this can cause haemorrhage. The process is documented with photos and a representative from the Government's wildlife conservation has to be present. The vet also has to apply for a permit to do the procedure. After the horn is cut off, diesel is poured onto the horns and they are burned, and this is also documented. A major problem with the permit application process is that it is very slow, and by the time the vet gets a licence for the rhino, it might have been poached in the meantime. Another problem with dehorning female rhinos is that they use the horn to defend their calf from male rhinos, which can lead to the calf being killed if the mother can't protect it.

Another approach is to microchip the horns. One farmer that we visited didn't want his rhinos to live without their horns, as he believed they lost their pride and beauty without them. So, in this case the rhinos are darted, a small hole is drilled into each of the two horns and a microchip is inserted into the horn. The drilled out section is placed in a jar, along with blood samples and some pieces of hair. These are sent to a lab to be DNA profiled, so that if a rhino poacher is caught and some form of DNA is found and it can be traced, then the poacher can be charged. The problem with this system is that it doesn't prevent the poacher from killing the rhinos in the first place. If a person has a permit to keep a rhino horn, the horn will have a microchip and this will be checked yearly to ensure that it has not been illegally sold.

It is horrifying to think that, if nothing sustainable is done soon, these magnificent animals might become extinct in my lifetime.

How to talk to the rest of the world

By Jenny Brazier (AVS Secretary – 3rd Year, London)

Being well into my third year of the vet course, and attending one of the vet schools where contact with non-veterinary related students is at an absolute minimum, I recently found myself unable to talk to ‘normal’ people. I made this sudden realisation during the annual reunion with my friends from school over the Christmas holidays.

As veterinary medicine was one of the more unusual degree choices among my friends (most being subjects continued on from school), there has always been a high level of interest in my day-to-day life at university. During the preclinical years this meant I could entertain them with stories of chasing sheep round pens during lambing time or the best technique for diving out of the firing line of the back end of a cow. Having fallen asleep during the technical lectures on cardiac drugs or urine concentration in the kidney, I was well aware that these are not suitable topics for conversation and my friends at home were never subjected to the many, many less interesting lectures that we have had to sit through.

However, this has all changed now that I have entered the clinical part of the course, and with the prospect of rotations and actually being able to interact with sick and injured animals on the horizon, our lectures have suddenly become a lot more interesting. They are actually teaching us things to do with being a practising vet. This enthusiasm on my part does not translate very well when you decide to pick the moment everyone has just started eating to launch into the different

types of pus you have come across during pathology lectures. It took me a surprisingly long time to realise that the silence that followed my little speech was not due to awe at the vet course, but disgust. Needless to say mine was the only clean plate that evening. With a swift topic change towards the more palatable ‘is anyone off on holiday soon’, appetites had picked up a bit by dessert.

I managed to do it again later in the evening by going into the details of my first official cow rectal examination. They somehow didn’t see

the funny side of what happened when someone’s glove broke; by now the disgusted looks were mingled with worry... even fright. They seemed to be concerned about my

sanity, after finding that inserting my arm up the rectum of a cow was a perfectly acceptable thing to do.

Unfortunately this disgusted silence following my conversa-

tions with non-vets is becoming more frequent as I progress through the course, and my friends (and family for that matter) have not yet learned to avoid asking me about what we vet students get up to.

‘It took me a surprisingly long time to realise that the silence that followed my little speech was not due to awe at the vet course, but disgust.’

Here are a few tips for keeping the conversation going when you venture out of the veterinary bubble

- Avoid bringing up anything to do with bodily fluids, especially around meal times.
- Try to stick to stories involving live animals. Ones with animals that end up dead are a big no.
- Refrain from mentioning the time we spend looking/cutting/prodding external genitalia, especially around men.
- Ask lots of questions about your friends’ courses, even if you have to listen to how difficult they find it to get up for their one day of lectures a week.
- Never appear bitter about all the travelling and trips your friends have done during their extensive EMS-free holidays.
- If in public with other vet students, keep your voice down so as not to alarm strangers. However, talking loudly can be used if in overcrowded conditions – I have cleared a Tube carriage at rush hour by talking about the different types of penis we had come across that day during dissections. It was a much more comfortable journey after that.
- If all else fails, talk about the weather.

Make yourself the best person for the best job

By market intelligence consultancy Onswitch

Considering how much of your adult life is going to be spent in the workplace, finding a great job that is fulfilling, financially rewarding, challenging and fun is going to be top of your to do list – just as it will be for every other final-year veterinary student.

While there may be enough jobs to go round, you don't just want a job, you want the best one . . . just like everyone else.

Bagging a great job is going to need some focus and determination, but help is at hand if you read on.

What does your future employer really want?

The best candidate will need to fulfil a number of different criteria. And when you understand what practices are looking for, you'll be able to show them exactly how you shape up against these key parameters.

Onswitch asked a range of practices what they look for in potential employees, and clinical skills actually play only a very small part. Some of the most frequently mentioned words were: enthusiasm, compassion, connection, clinical skills, personable, empathy, willingness, confidence, team skills, curiosity, conscientious.

The fact is that practices are not just paying your wages; they are making a significant financial investment in the business's future, as 20 per cent of the average practice's turnover is spent on paying its vets. Every post filled has to be with the right candidate. And they'll have plenty of candidates to choose from when 30 CVs and letters arrive to apply for just one job.

Stand out, for the right reasons

Faced with 30 applications, your potential employer will most probably first scan through them. Any that are scruffily presented or badly spelt will be cast aside at this point. This is worth repeating – no matter how great your experience or results – if you can't be bothered to present a tidy and accurate persona at the application stage, you won't get past it. Essentially, you're sending a clear message to the practice that that's how you'd be as a colleague and clinician – slapdash and half-hearted.

In order to appear professional and employable, it's important to make sure that you:

- Use the spell checker facility and ask your parents or tutors to have a read through too.
- Don't use coloured paper.
- Keep to a standard text colour, size and font throughout.
- Keep things brief – no waffle and repetition.
- Don't go past two pages – that's easily enough for you to be able to sum everything up and keep your potential employer's interest.
- Follow a standard structure for laying out your CV and covering letter (there are lots of examples online).
- Tailor the content to each specific position. It may seem a pain re-doing each one, but potential employers can spot a blanket approach a mile off, and it doesn't tell them that you're keen to work with them. Just someone. Anyone.
- Spell the practice name (and the word 'veterinary') correctly.
- Address your letter to a named person, not 'The Practice Manager'. And spell their name correctly.

There's a debate at the moment concerning 'clever' applications – candidates who may have made a video, sent their application on a USB stick or via e-mail, connected with the practice via LinkedIn and so on. Most directors and principals agree that this demonstrates an innovative and free-thinking candidate, and would therefore pique their interest and might secure an interview. As long as it's not too clever – too much like technology for technology's sake – all form and no substance. Just be aware that your potential employer is likely to be from a different generation to you, so don't overdo things.

Successful interviews

A well-presented, personalised and meaty CV and covering letter should secure you an interview, and demonstrate to the practice that you could do the job. The interview is simply your chance to prove that you'd fit it well and do it so much better than the other candidates.

Once again, there are a few tips and techniques to keep in mind:

- Do plenty of research beforehand – check out the practice website and any presence on Facebook, Twitter, etc.
- Don't be late! Allow plenty of time to find the practice, or park nearby. Have plenty of loose change for public transport or parking, and make sure that you have the practice number stored in your mobile so that you can contact them if anything untoward does happen en route.
- Dress smartly and not too trendy – you want to be a professional version of yourself, but you don't want to scare the olds!
- Clean your shoes and your nails (you're hoping to be operating at some point).
- Shake hands firmly, and introduce yourself clearly and succinctly.

- Make eye contact at all times.
- Have a spare copy of your CV with you.
- Prepare a list of questions that demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm, not just basic ones that show that you haven't bothered to prepare.
- Ask about hours, rotas, emergency cover, special clinics, induction programmes, PDP support and so on.

Of course, they will also have some questions for you! Before you go into the interview, prepare some examples of situations where you have shown particular skills – leadership, conviction, teamwork, etc – as well as tangible achievements in any of your work experience, clubs or college responsibilities (introducing new systems, winning funding, setting up websites, managing a marketing campaign and so on). There are sure to be plenty of examples from every side of your life, veterinary or not.

Take a second to get your thoughts straight before answering each question, and keep your replies to the point. Make sure you know what you've written in your CV (and that it's all true), so that there are no inconsistencies that may make them doubt your abilities. Criteria-based questions search for evidence that you have the relevant understanding and experience of common situations, so expect to be asked questions like these:

How do you manage your time to deliver key deadlines?

Give me examples of when you have missed a deadline and what you did to manage the situation. How did it work?

Describe a situation where you have had to fight for administrative improvements, perhaps when others didn't want them.

Tell me about a time that you have helped a colleague focus on getting details correct.

If, on top of everything else, you keep calm and portray a realistic picture of yourself, then there's nothing more you can do. If you don't get the job, ask for detailed feedback so that you can improve your performance next time. If you do get the job, then the fun really begins!

Finally, once you're in practice, you're going to be working with all kinds of clients in all sorts of emotional states; it will be crucial to ensure that your people skills are just as great as your clinical ones. Demonstrating to a potential employer that you have an efficient and empathic consulting style, can go a long way towards making you a desirable employee.

- Onswitch offers a range of veterinary-focused courses to help clinicians at every level to hone their consulting skills. More information is available at www.onswitch.co.uk.

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Mental illness: it's more common than you might think

By Rachel Spittle (1st Year, Nottingham)

Mental illness is not uncommon in the veterinary profession, or in any high stress occupation. 'Approximately one in four people will experience some sort of a mental health problem in the course of a year' (www.mind.org.uk). Fortunately, there are many ways of dealing with it.

You'd be surprised by how many students and qualified vets are struggling/coping with some form of mental health issue while going about their day-to-day lives.

I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder in December 2011, and since then it has been a rocky road. It all started when I stopped getting enough sleep . . . I was getting a maximum of four hours per night, while trying to do approximately 60 hours' work each week. This is not conducive to a healthy mind. I gradually found myself becoming clumsy, forgetful, and having feelings of helplessness and uselessness, which are common early warning signs. Other signs can include headaches, an inability to concentrate, neglecting one's appearance, overeating/not eating, feeling unable to cope with everyday tasks and feeling

as though you can't control your emotions.

It all came to a head one morning in a practical when I was dissecting a chicken . . . I made a small incision into the neck to expose the syringe and the scalpel blade continued into my own skin. It was just a small cut, but it was deep

and it bled – a lot. I started to cry, not because it hurt particularly, but because I finally felt like it was all too much and I just couldn't cope any more. It was scary too, because I thought that I would get kicked out of vet school for having the disorder – but I couldn't have been more wrong. All the vet school wanted to do was to help me get back on my feet; thanks to the help and support I received, I have been able to return to study.

After spending a year at home on leave, I have had time to recover. I am back now, continuing my first year studies and looking forward to what the future holds. I am well and have been for 10 months. My medication keeps me on a level playing field, and I am finally feel able to cope with eve-

ryday life.

One of the main things I find that helps keep me sane is finding a healthy balance . . . and sticking to it! I find that if I go to lectures, and then do all of the additional work I think I should be doing, I overdo it and get ill. I have to incorporate relaxation time, 'me' time, time to exercise and

time to be sociable.

'It is important to remember that having a mental health problem is not a sign of weakness.' I really struggled with this idea, and years down the line of having numerous other problems with my health has not made it easy. I found the hardest part was accepting that I have the condition and that, if I want to move forward, then I am going to have to work with it, not against it. As a result, I have found that I am a happier, more in control person, and I am finally beginning to feel like myself again.

Mind

I have found Mind's website to be a really good source of information. Check it out if you have any queries, or want to learn more about mental health issues (www.mind.org.uk)

'It is important to remember that having a mental health problem is not a sign of weakness.'
www.mind.org.uk



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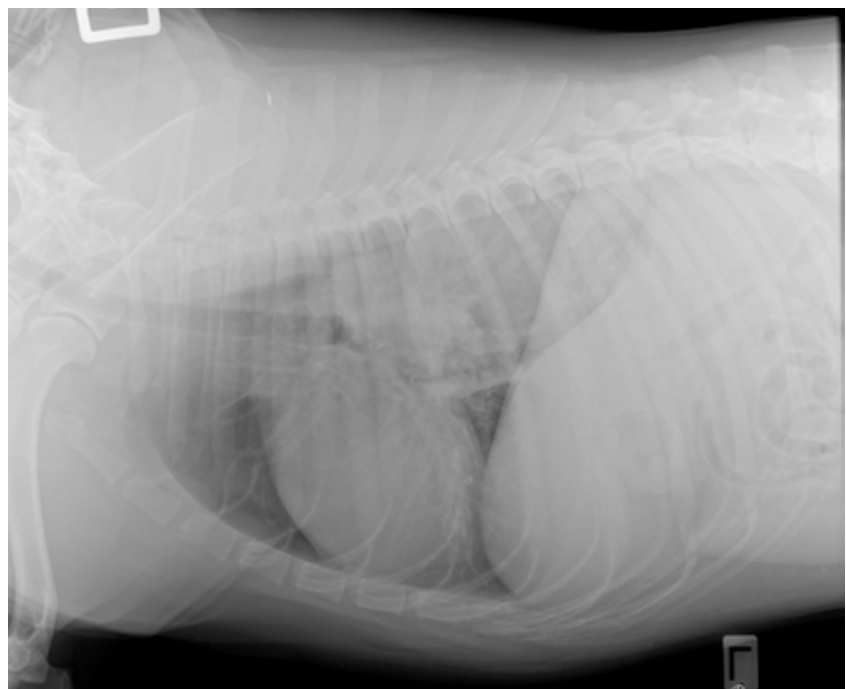
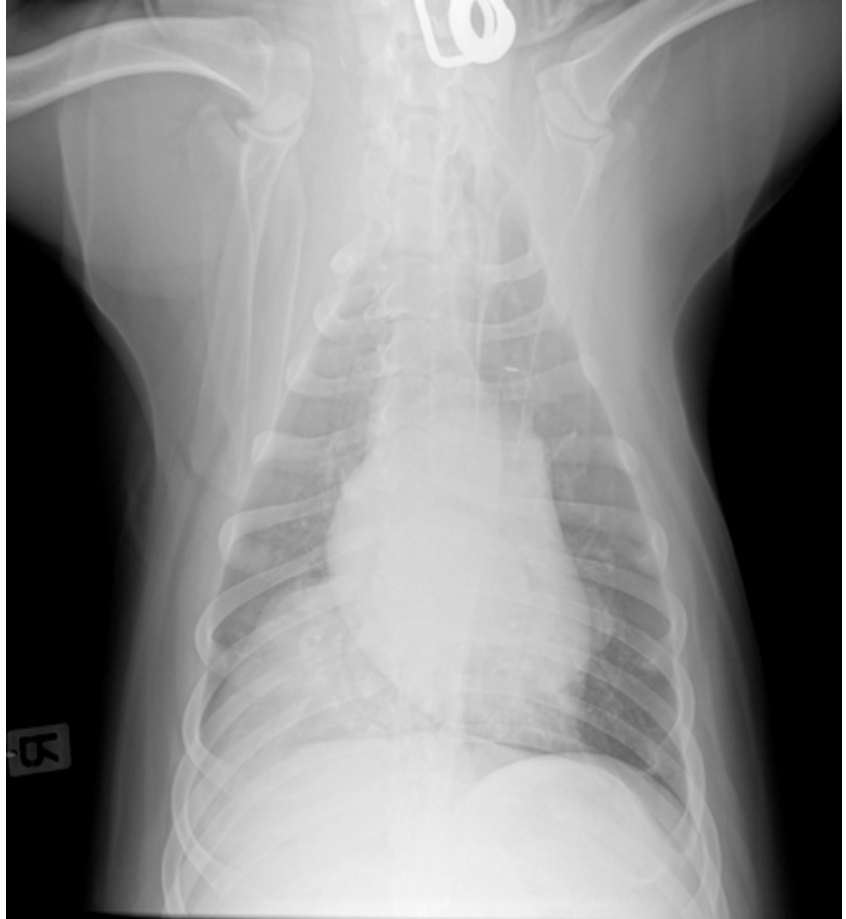
By Colleen Mitchell, DipACVR, and Michael Ethier, DipAVCECC, Toronto Veterinary Emergency Hospital and Referral Services.
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A three-year-old male neutered labrador cross was referred to Toronto Veterinary Emergency Hospital (TVEH) for evaluation of a persistent cough. Approximately two months prior to referral, he had been evaluated and treated by the referring veterinarian for suspected *Bordetella bronchiseptica* infection. Despite doxycycline therapy, his cough persisted and a trial period of trimeprazine with prednisolone was administered. The coughing initially improved, only to relapse again with decreasing doses.

Thoracic radiographs obtained by the referring veterinarian were suspicious for possible pneumonia. A brief response to antibiotic therapy (amoxicillin and clavulanic acid) was noted. Recurrence of cough prior to completion of the antibiotics prompted referral to TVEH for further diagnostic testing and treatment. There was no known travel history and heartworm prophylaxis was current.

On presentation, the dog was quiet but alert and responsive with a high normal rectal temperature (39.3°C). He was eupneic with a moist, productive cough elicited on tracheal palpation. Dull lung sounds were appreciable over the right caudal lung fields. No murmur or arrhythmia was auscultated. There were no other significant abnormalities on physical examination. Complete blood count and serum biochemical profile were unremarkable. Differential diagnoses for persistent cough include antibiotic resistant bacterial pneumonia, parasitic pneumonia, heartworm disease, fungal pneumonia, non-infectious bronchopneumopathy (eosinophilic bronchopneumopathy), and neoplasia.

Thoracic radiographs were obtained and are shown here. Think about your own diagnosis before turning over to find out more.



And the diagnosis was . . .

The radiographic diagnoses were:

1. Severe perihilar lymphadenopathy.
2. Lobar alveolar pulmonary pattern, right caudal lung lobe.
3. Focal alveolar pulmonary pattern within left caudal lung lobe.

No other abnormalities were detected.

The ranked differential list included neoplasia (histiocytic sarcoma, lymphoma) and fungal pneumonia (coccidioidomycosis, histoplasmosis, and blastomycosis). The perihilar lymphadenopathy narrowed the differential diagnosis list considerably. Since the dog did not have a history of travel to endemic areas (of the US), coccidioidomycosis and histoplasmosis were excluded.

In a recent study of histiocytic sarcoma in dogs, lymphadenopathy and pulmonary masses (especially in the right middle lung lobe) were the most common imaging charac-

teristics of this disease. (Tsai 2011).

Diagnostic procedures to be considered include transtracheal wash (TTW), bronchoscopy and transthoracic ultrasound-guided fine needle aspiration.

TTW is generally considered less expensive, less invasive and associated with a lower complication rate than bronchoscopy. However, in more focal pulmonary disease involving primarily the pulmonary interstitium, as compared to bronchial or airway involvement, the risk of a non-diagnostic sample is high. Bronchoscopy not only allows direct visualisation of airways, but a focused evaluation of the lobe in question. Unfortunately, in an already critical patient, stimulation of the airway, as well the complications associated with general anaesthesia in a dyspnoeic patient, may result in clinical deterioration.

In consolidated, non-aerated lungs, ultrasound-guided transthoracic aspirates is a quick and relatively safe means of obtaining a cytological diagnosis if the lesion is adjacent to the thoracic wall. Often minimal sedation or short injectable anaesthesia (eg, Propofol) is all that is required. Pneumothorax is a possible complication, but unlikely in aspiration of a consolidated lung with little to no air flow.

Cytology from transthoracic aspirates confirmed a poorly differentiated and anaplastic malignant round cell with secondary inflammation. Based on the poor prognosis and metastasis to the perihilar lymph nodes, the owners elected euthanasia.

Reference

TSAI, S. and others (2011) *Veterinary Radiology and Ultrasound*, **53**, 21-27

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Getting extra from EMS

By the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

Extramural Studies (EMS) offers essential experience of real life veterinary work, and most students are keen to get the most from it. As 'near professionals', students have obligations to their universities and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), not to mention the practices and other organisations that volunteer to host students. So, how can you get what you need, and keep everyone happy?

Be prepared

Both clinical and pre-clinical placements involve a variety of working environments, so it's worth checking beforehand what is generally expected at each type of workplace. The online EMS 'driving licences' (developed by the Universities of Edinburgh and Bristol, and the Royal Veterinary College) can help, and now have versions for pre-clinical and clinical EMS. They also answer common questions; for example, 'should I stay in the room during a euthanasia consult?'. A completion certificate for each can be saved and printed – some practices may ask to see this.

Finding placements

Depending on which university you attend, you will usually need to find EMS placements for yourself. For clinical placements, you can identify practices that take EMS students by searching Find a Vet – <http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/find-a-vet/> – if you find somewhere that no longer takes students, please ask that practice to update us.

Before a clinical placement

Universities encourage practices to nominate a single contact point – usually a vet, veterinary nurse or

the practice manager – so you can check with them, for example, about what to bring and how to prepare. The RCVS produces guidance for practices on what is expected during placements, so familiarise yourself with this and make sure the practice has a copy, as well as the guidance from your university. Student members of the British Veterinary Association (BVA) can also access the BVA's EMS guidance at www.bva.co.uk/students.

It's also never too early to start to familiarise yourself with the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons, which will help you to understand the professional obligations of veterinary surgeons.

Objective setting

EMS gives you the chance to practise what you have already learned during your course, and to consolidate this into the day one competences, which all vets must have at graduation, and which are the minimum required for safe practice. So it's useful to consider these competences when setting your objectives for EMS.

You can start to build up your experience and develop your day one competence early on in clinical EMS, even if you're only able to observe most aspects of clinical practice. An awareness of how a practice works and issues such as client communication and confidentiality are relevant to all practices so can be acquired, for example, at a farm practice even if you want to work with small animals. Try to discuss your objectives with the practice prior to or at the beginning of your placement, as you may need to amend them depending on what the practice can offer.

On placement

Preparation and enthusiasm count for a lot with practices and will help you get the most from each

placement – even if it is at a type of practice that doesn't fit your long-term career plans. You may need to tell practices what you have or haven't covered yet on your course – although some may be familiar with your university and expect you to have read your lecture notes before you turn up.

Although you will learn new things on EMS, the practice's role isn't to teach you the things that your university course will cover. EMS helps you to consolidate what you have already been taught, and to build up your experience, subject to overriding considerations of animal health and welfare, and sensitivity to clients' needs.

Thinking longer term

The knowledge and skills you are gaining as an undergraduate are the basis for a career-long process of continuing professional development (CPD), starting, once qualified, with the Professional Development Phase (PDP).

To emphasise the link to later CPD, an online Student Experience Log is being developed for students to record experience gained on EMS and internal rotations. This will sit alongside the online PDP and CPD record, which vets use to plan and record their CPD. When you graduate, you will need to register for PDP and record your experience online using the RCVS's Professional Development Record. The Student Experience Log will parallel this and provide a single portal for you to log and monitor how you are developing your clinical and practical experience. We are developing the log with your universities, each of which has slightly different EMS systems, and it should be available later this year.

Feedback

After EMS, practices are asked to give feedback, via a form, to the

university, which you can ask your university to discuss with you. It is also important for you to provide feedback on your experience with the practice or organisation, but if you do encounter problems during the placement, don't wait until it's over – even if it is only a short placement, it is better try to resolve any issues early on. Your university EMS co-ordinator will also help if there has been any misunderstanding.

Most placements do go well, and practices say they enjoy the enthusiasm and fresh ideas students bring. Vets also say that by helping EMS students they are doing what others once did for them – as, we hope, one day you will too.



Useful links

- Pre-clinical EMS 'driving licence', www.vet.ed.ac.uk/animal_management_husbandry_OPT
- Clinical EMS 'driving licence', www.vet.ed.ac.uk/ems_driving_licence
- RCVS guidance, www.rcvs.org.uk/education/extra-mural-studies-ems
- 'Day One Skills', www.rcvs.org.uk/document-library/day-one-skills
- BVA guidance (members only), www.bva.co.uk/publications_and_resources/Leaflets.aspx
- RCVS Code of Professional Conduct, www.rcvs.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons

Veterinary forensics

By Emily Ratsep (4th Year, Liverpool)

At the University of Liverpool, students in their third year are expected to complete a dissertation on a topic of their choice. This can range from research to a literature review, but the choice remains their own. Many students focus on 'vetty' studies (those on living animals); however, in my case I chose something a little different: veterinary forensics. More specifically, I chose veterinary forensic entomology.

When people hear the word forensics or even forensic entomology, the first thing that often comes to mind are the human-focused television programmes such as CSI or Criminal Minds. Yet many fail to realise that the same techniques highlighted in these shows can be, and are, in use in the veterinary field when investigating cases of animal abuse or neglect.

In essence, forensic entomology is using information known about an insect's lifestyle in the investigation of neglect or cause of death. Though it may seem rather technically advanced, it is actually a method that has been in use for centuries. The first recorded use of forensic entomology as a method for investigation of crime scenes dates from as early as the mid 10th century in China.

What supports the use of entomology in a forensic situation is that the life cycles of certain species of insects coincide with stages of decomposition or degrees of post-mortem pathological change. As a result, information about insect host preference, life cycle and rates of growth can all be used to determine not only how long a body has been dead, but whether or not that death had been preceded by any form of neglect or specific trauma.

Veterinary pathologists can use forensic entomology in order to determine an (almost) exact time

of death. The ability to determine the time of death is one of the difficulties in the realm of pathology, certainly if you're trying to back it up with scientific evidence to give it legal standing.

There are many changes that are recognised to coincide with a certain degree of decomposition after death. However, beyond the first 72 hours, the ability to deduce time of death, with a degree of certainty that would stand up in court, decreases. Forensic entomology provides a way by which this gap in information can be filled.

Insects develop on a quantifiable and predictable time schedule at different temperatures. If a pathologist is given the temperature and location where a body is found, the collection of insect specimens on that body will allow a veterinary forensic entomologist to determine a number of things about the body, and how long it may have been dead. It is purely by using the variety of information provided by insects

taken from the area or wrappings in which the body was found that the forensic entomologist can draw several conclusions with a degree of certainty that would be uncontested in a court of law. These findings include the likely time since death, whether or not the body had been moved, whether or not the body had any particular types of trauma or neglect preceding death and whether or not the body was tampered with at any time.

Forensic entomology is currently predominantly used for human cases and is often an adjunct to the forensic pathology department of police services, and its use in a veterinary capacity is still in its infancy. The use of forensic entomology in veterinary practice with domestic animals and in wildlife investigations is reported in Canada and the USA and is growing in importance, especially for the determination of time of neglect in Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, North America (SPCA) cases that go forward for prosecution.

In the UK, investigators from the pathology department at the University of Liverpool have used forensic entomology with some success in a relatively small number of RSPCA cases of neglect or welfare concern. However, a lack of certain kinds of entomological information has limited the ability to draw detailed conclusions. A change to certain practices in body retrieval and entomological evidence collection could increase the extent of information that could be applied to cases brought forward to the University of Liverpool for investigation. Such improved practices would provide not only the valuable ability to estimate more accurately the time of death, but also to detect aspects of neglect, which could assist in creating a body of evidence that would be admissible in court and could be stated with a stronger degree of certainty than is presently possible. I was fortunate to have been able to take this problem on as the focus of my research and not only review the practices that could help to improve the quality of the

information found in RSPCA cases, but assist in forming a plan of action for the future collection of insect evidence so that it could be used in court.

Veterinary forensic entomology is used fairly infrequently in abuse and neglect cases, which is frequently due to the lack of awareness of its application and its availability as a science. The increased use of forensic entomology could benefit veterinary pathology and the investigation of cases of abuse and neglect in the UK and, with any luck, the research I was involved in may help with that.

I know that some of us tend to

approach our dissertation projects with a feeling of 'please just get it over with'. Yet it can provide some incredibly valuable experiences. If you take the time and make the effort to find something that you have an interest in, or are passionate about, you will enjoy your project more, and your research may even result in publication, presentations at conferences or sometimes even a change to the status quo. It is worth looking at what the veterinary degree provides students with through a different pair of eyes . . . maybe even through those of an insect!



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Channelling my inner farmerette

By Elizabeth Gray (4th Year, Dublin)

Should I put lubricant on this (act confident)? I'm just going to shove this thermometer in here . . . (oh err, I probably should have put lubricant on that). Has it been a minute yet? Where is the mercury? Is that a normal temperature for a pig?

That was how it felt doing my first solo physical examination of a Bonham (a weaned pig), while seeing practice in rural Ireland. Four years into the course, I still can't take a rectal temperature without questioning myself. Back then, I proceeded to then put my stethoscope on backwards and spent two minutes listening to silence while looking puzzled at the rise and fall of the pig's chest. Medical marvel or completely incompetent student?

I know that by now I should know better. 'Oh, I haven't covered that topic yet', was my mantra last year – the comfort of ignorance. Now I am completely exposed and armed with an array of passed modules, none of which I seem to use as effectively as last year's ignorance. Now the questions are followed by long silences, all of which I know I am expected to break. And sometimes you have to rely on a tactical guess.

'Liz. handle that heifer and tell me why she isn't bulling?' Thinks: right, let's do this . . . there's the cervix. Yay!

Cue: bovine flatulence that leaves me covered in this digested silage, some of which is dripping into my mouth. Lovely. Now I'm distracted and fumbling for some clues. 'Err . . . cystic ovary?'. 'Very good!' says the vet to my amazement and I swagger back to the van rubbing my face clean. I am a veterinary genius.

My experiences in rural practice so far included a series of embarrassing events:

- *I was asked to watch a gap in the fence during a TB test and, having failed to do so, spent 40 minutes chasing heifers up a country road.*
- *I have mistaken clients wives/ girlfriends for their daughters.*
- *I have been told to 'try again' after breaking the ninth bottle vacuum, trying to draw blood from the tail of a lively Limousin heifer under the watchful eye of the farmer and every neighbour within a 5 km radius.*
- *I have vaccinated the consultation room wall against canine distemper, parvovirus, leptospirosis and hepatitis.*
- *I have vaccinated myself for kennel cough (on more than one occasion).*
- *I have examined and prepared a rabbit for a castration only to be told that it's female.*
- *I have been asked to remain in the van because my red hair will 'curse the land'.*
- *Farmers have mistaken me for a boy (also more than once).*

Seeing rural practice involves developing as a person; I have developed a split personality. Every morning I zip up my bodywarmer and channel my inner farmerette. As a self-confessed 'towny', I have struggled to grasp basic farming concepts. I am preparing myself for the inevitable, that of becoming a farmer's wife – or so I am told repeatedly (fingers crossed).

I prepare for this role by scanning through every farming publication. Here, I pick up useful phrases and topics of conversation. I use these to stealthily fill the silences when the vet returns to the van and I am left awkwardly shuffling about. 'There's no dry in that land'; 'What's the fodder situation like?'; '€45 for a bail of grass!'; 'Good price for weanlings at the moment?'. I know that I have failed to play the role convincingly when the farmer finishes the exchange with: 'So, you're into small animals then?'.

The past year has been character building, and my shame levels are pretty much non-existent as a result. I always feel like an imposter and that I will be told to pack my proverbial bags at any moment. But, luckily, Irish farmers have a wicked sense of humour and our vets are patient (and good craic), so that between my episodes of humiliation I seem to be learning something. Hopefully I am not the only one making a complete fool of myself.

Vet Record Careers

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