Getting back up to speed

Changing demographics in the veterinary profession mean that more people are taking career breaks. This year, the BVA is hosting a series of refresher days to help those returning to practice get back up to speed.

The Royal Veterinary College has been running refresher days for vets returning to practice for some years. This autumn, in partnership with the BVA, it will be holding a series of four events at the BVA’s headquarters in London.

Refresher courses provide updates and refresh the principles of core areas of practice for vets returning to practice either after a career break to have children, or for other reasons, or for those changing their area of practice – for example, from large animal practice to small animal practice, or from government work to private practice.

With the changing demographics of the profession, there are a greater number of vets taking career breaks to raise children. A lot can change in the five to 10 years they might be away from practice, and it is easy to forget even core principles when one is not practising and one’s brain is engaged with other things. So these one-day events aim to provide an update on what’s new, but, also very importantly, they are a reminder of core principles.

The courses have been devised by the RVC’s director of professional development and head of its CPD unit, Jill Maddison, who points out that they are not a rerun of an undergraduate curriculum, but focus on what the unit feels is important.

‘In the past the RVC has run up to 12 days covering more areas of practice. However, this year, because it’s our first time at the BVA, we thought we would trial four of them, and I have chosen four topics that are either right at the core of practice or in an area where many people feel unsure.

‘The days are inexpensive compared with usual CPD rates because the participants tend to be self-funding; that is, they don’t have a practice paying for their CPD.’

The days will focus on internal medicine, soft tissue surgery and ophthalmology.

**Internal medicine I**

Dr Maddison will cover the diagnostic approaches to the most common clinical problems encountered in small animal practice. Key areas will include developing a logical approach to clinical problems, vomiting, diarrhoea, and interpreting clinical pathology tests, especially in relation to liver, pancreatic and kidney function.

**Internal medicine II**

David Church will concentrate on advances in the diagnosis and management of commonly encountered endocrine disorders (diabetes mellitus, hyperadrenocorticism, hypoadrenocorticism and hyperthyroidism), as well as management of renal disease in dogs and cats.

**Soft tissue surgery**

Vicky Lipscomb will review surgical principles, including aseptic technique, peri-
operative antibiosis and analgesia, choice of suture materials and suture patterns, appropriate instrument use and surgical techniques. These principles will be discussed using case-based material and pictures, with reference to common surgical procedures including ovariohysterectomy and castration, exploratory laparotomy, enterotomy, wound closure and excision of mammary tumours.

Ophthalmology
Can you remember how to examine the posterior segment of the eye (the lens and fundus), and what a good examination might tell you? Is there really something new for the treatment of feline conjunctivitis? With a number of new topical medications for glaucoma on the market, how do you choose which to use? Elaine Holt aims to increase your confidence recognising and treating common ophthalmic conditions.

Ten-minute chat
Iain Richards has a mixed role in a mixed practice in Cumbria – one day he might be on a farm, another in theatre and the next at the computer. He has just finished his term of office as president of the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons.

What made you become a vet?
I have had an abiding interest in natural history, which started with bird-watching aged about nine. Then, studying biology at school pushed me towards natural sciences. Being insatiably curious has added to the mixture. I rejected medicine (twice) and my mother had read his books and suggested I became a vet. I’m not sure why it hadn’t occurred to me. I was lucky to see practice in Liverpool, and to work on my uncle’s farm in Shropshire. I spent two weeks with his vet, and after that there was never any question of me doing anything else. Even retaking A-levels (twice) did not deter me.

How did you get to where you are today?
Serendipity! I was happy in a practice in Glossop, but my wife (a medical oncologist) was looking for a consultant post. An area that combined a hospital offering radiotherapy and a mixed practice was not easy to find. Came the fateful day when she suggested Kirkby Lonsdale as a location to live, so she could work in Preston. That week’s Veterinary Record featured a practice for sale in Kendal. Less than a year later I was sole owner of a five-vet practice, and three years later bought the neighbouring Kirkby practice. Becoming part of the XLVets group has been part of our gradual growth and commitment to excellence.

Politically, I volunteered to be the BVA Council rep for the Lakeland division in 1999. Since then I seem to have been slightly coerced into various roles (which I’m glad of, because I’ve enjoyed it).

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career?
Do it. There are times when one wonders why one has chosen this route, but it has given me so much, and it is interesting, fun, and fulfilling.

What do you like about your job?
The variety. I’m happy to admit that as a mixed practitioner I am a near-extinct breed, but I get a lot of pleasure from dealing with all the major species. At present, if pushed, I’d rather be on-farm, but as old rugby injuries kick in, it may change for a day in theatre.

If I had to chose one task as a favourite, it would probably be a colt castration in the field. It’s a combination of surgery plus the challenge of anaesthetising a large and potentially unpredictable animal. On a warm day, in a field, sitting on the front end while my colleagues get messy; what’s not to like? I also enjoy the challenge of running a business and the staff within it. I have learned much from my involvement with the SPVS, and I still can see areas where we can make improvements.

What do you not like?
Oddly enough, almost the same answer. It is becoming increasingly hard to keep up to the clinical standards in all areas. I sometimes feel I am becoming a triage vet. I’m good at recognising when to let someone else take over.

Why is your job important?
Being a vet and running my own practice up to the clinical standards in all areas. I have had an abiding interest in natural history, which started with bird-watching aged about nine. Then, studying biology at school pushed me towards natural sciences. Being insatiably curious has added to the mixture. I rejected medicine (twice) and my mother had read his books and suggested I became a vet. I’m not sure why it hadn’t occurred to me. I was lucky to see practice in Liverpool, and to work on my uncle’s farm in Shropshire. I spent two weeks with his vet, and after that there was never any question of me doing anything else. Even retaking A-levels (twice) did not deter me.

What’s the best piece of advice you were ever given?
If a cow is down, give it calcium. And don’t get angry with the slow driver in front of you when on call – it could be your client.

What was your proudest moment?
Three, if I am allowed. One was talking to an old chap who, after I’d put his dog down, told me that was his last as he was too old to get another. I asked him if he’d consider a rescue dog, and he came in two days later with his new dog on a lead. The second was being asked to be president of one of our local shows as a thank-you for the work I did during the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease outbreak. And the third was getting my SPVS past-president’s medal.

What was your most embarrassing moment?
Getting two black cats mixed up and putting the wrong one down was a major low. Being able to sort things out with the clients afterwards helped.

What do you do when not a vet?
Depending on the weather and the time of year – sailing, walking, skiing and cooking (whatever the occasion). Music or reading when it’s just too wet to do anything else.
Ten-minute chat

Iain Richards

Veterinary Record 2010 166: ii
doi: 10.1136/vr.g6996

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/166/26/ii

Email alerting service

These include:
Receive free email alerts when new articles cite this article. Sign up in the box at the top right corner of the online article.

Topic Collections

Articles on similar topics can be found in the following collections
Ten Minute chats (132)

Notes

To request permissions go to:
http://group.bmj.com/group/rights-licensing/permissions

To order reprints go to:
http://journals.bmj.com/cgi/reprintform

To subscribe to BMJ go to:
http://group.bmj.com/subscribe/