SVS invites you to talk sheep

Dick Thompson describes an initiative which could help recent graduates without too much time on their hands to develop their interest in ovine medicine.

‘TALKING Sheep’ complements the Sheep Veterinary Society’s (SVS) spring and autumn conferences, and aims to accommodate sheep enthusiasts who may not be able to make it to the main meetings.

Dotted around the country, these – mainly evening – meetings (sponsored by Intervet Schering-Plough) give recent graduates the opportunity to present interesting case histories in an informal, friendly, atmosphere: only an interest in sheep is compulsory!

The idea came from SVS member Fiona Lovatt, who asked the society to run local, informal sheep groups. This has since grown to 13 regional discussion groups. Details have been circulated via the SVS and the BVA’s Young Vet Network. Meetings will be clinically based, and involve several short (maximum 15-minute) talks by people within the group, for example, case reports or presentations of new (or modified) procedures that could generate discussion.

It is hoped that other younger members will be suitably encouraged to want to take part next time round (or this time if they are able to volunteer quickly). Anyone who would like to come along should contact the secretariat at the Moredun Research Institute via e-mail, secretariat@sheepvetsoc.org.uk.

The first meeting was held on January 18 at the A66 Motel near Scotch Corner, and attracted 25 vets, 15 of whom had qualified within the past five years. Although none of them gave presentations on the evening, most said they would volunteer to do so on similar future occasions.

Where to talk sheep

Further details of the other proposed venues are available on the society’s website www.sheepvetsoc.org.uk.

The next two meetings will be held in Scotland and Wales on February 16 (at the Buccleuch Arms Hotel, St Boswells, and the VLA Shrewsbury), followed by meetings in Carmarthen (February 17); Buxton (February 23) and Penrith (March 10). Others are planned for North Wales, Devon, Preston, Northamptonshire, Wincanton, Hereford and Perth, with dates to be confirmed.

This is intended to be an annual project with meetings in different areas – Northern Ireland has already put in a bid to host the first ‘Talking sheep 2011’. Why not get involved by hosting a meeting, coming along or offering to speak?

This year’s SVS spring meeting takes place in Jersey from May 17 to 19; the autumn meeting will be in Newcastle upon Tyne in September.
Get it in writing!

It is important when you are offered a job to make sure you get the terms and conditions in writing. This way there is less likely to be a problem because of a misunderstanding about what the conditions of your employment actually are.

YOUR employer has a legal obligation to provide you with a written statement of your terms and conditions of employment within two months of your starting work. A formal contract of employment is not a legal requirement but is strongly recommended, providing safeguards to both employer and employee, together with clarity of the rights and responsibilities of each. More information about this is available at www.bva.co.uk/contracts

What should I do before I sign a contract of employment?

Before signing any contract of employment, you should check that the terms and conditions tally with what you were told at the interview, are fair and reasonable and that you are willing to abide by them.

At its most basic, the contract of employment comes within the category of a contract at common law. The ‘rules’ applicable for a contract of employment to apply are as follows:

- There must be an offer of employment and an acceptance;
- There must be a consideration (that is, payment for services rendered);
- The parties must intend to create a legal relationship;
- The parties must have the legal capacity to enter into the contract;
- The work to be performed must not be illegal.

The common-law contract may be qualified or altered by statute. For example, certain disciplinary procedures are set out in law and these take precedence over whatever your contract may state.

If you are unsure, seek some independent advice on the contract either from a solicitor, the Citizens Advice Bureau or the BVA legal advice line (01206 731970).

This article is based on advice given in the ‘BVA new graduate guide’, a handbook provided to final-year students and graduates up to eight years’ qualified on joining the BVA. For more information visit www.bva.co.uk/youngvetnetwork

Ten-minute chat

Freda Scott-Park is a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry. She is married to a farmer and lives near Loch Lomond.

How did you get to where you are today?

I wanted to be a vet from about the age of four. This was probably stimulated by the biannual visit of the vet to the farm that my father managed in East Africa. It was a day of great excitement, gathering the stock and visiting all the different groups of animals.

After five years at the Dick Vet as an undergraduate, I was offered the chance to complete a PhD in canine cardiology, which I reluctantly embarked on, found incredibly lonesome to complete, but have never regretted. It has opened all the doors that have led to my current role as a consultant to the pharmaceutical industry.

What made you work for the pharmaceutical industry?

By accident really – I was sponsored through my PhD by a pharmaceutical company (my research was unrelated to any of their products), and in return I worked as a veterinary surgeon for them during investigations into novel cardiovascular medicines. Five years earlier, my father had died from a heart attack aged 62, and I found myself helping to develop medicines that, without doubt, would have prevented his death. It was a defining moment for me, and despite spending time in mixed practice, teaching VNAs and doing occasional locum work for the PDSA, I find my work for the pharmaceutical industry most stimulating.

What do you like about your job?

I have developed expertise in reading ECGs from the investigation into novel pharmaceutical compounds before their use is extended into clinical trials in humans. I work to exacting standards of good laboratory practice, and my reports are of critical importance to the company developing the new compound. I am well paid for my opinion, and in return I offer a professional service with comprehensive reports. My job satisfaction stems from the sense of providing an essential service, and from the mutual respect that exists between me and the companies I work for.

How do you spend a typical day?

I don’t have a typical day!

Why is your job important?

My job is critical to the family income since dairy farming is in such a dire state: revenue from outside the farm is what keeps the farms going.

As a veterinary surgeon working for the pharmaceutical industry, I have always felt comfortable, but the industry is viewed with suspicion by some. This is unfortunate since vets can make a huge contribution to a better understanding of animal welfare.

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career?

Go into practice first, but remember that not all veterinary graduates fit the practice ‘shoe’. There are many avenues that vets can explore, and working for the pharmaceutical industry is guaranteed to be stimulating, challenging and will put your considerable intelligence to good use.

What’s the best piece of advice you were ever given?

Experience is the best teacher: if you don’t try something, you cannot learn to love doing it; if you don’t try something, you cannot learn to avoid doing it.

What are your proudest moments?

Taking up the BVA Presidency, which I did a few years ago, and being awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Edinburgh.

What is your most embarrassing moment?

I was enjoying a wonderful venison steak with a garnish of enormous blueberries in very polite company. I stabbed a piece of fillet and a blueberry with my fork. The blueberry burst open and sprayed purple juice down the front of my white shirt. There was little I could do to remove it or hide it. The company was so polite nothing was said – actually, a good giggle would have been more reassuring.
Ten-minute chat

Freda Scott-Park

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