Online learning for veterinary nurses

A new online learning facility was launched last month at Fitzpatrick Referrals. Initially aimed at veterinary nurses, it has been designed to allow a flexible approach to CPD.

THE Fitzpatrick Learning Academy has been created to offer veterinary professionals ‘a new range of innovative learning, training and CPD opportunities’. Its first product, Veterinary Nursing CPD, was launched in July.

Developed in partnership with e-learning specialists Emerge Learning, the product offers subscribers the opportunity to complete a range of modules in a variety of different subjects. The academy reports that each module qualifies for three hours of CPD, which can be tracked and recorded online, together with any other CPD completed. The record can be downloaded at any time.

Topics available in the first year include anaesthetic emergencies, radiography, wound management, physiotherapy, nosocomial infections and pain management.

Each module is followed by a ‘Vetinar’ – a one-hour webinar, hosted by Josey Killner, the head nurse responsible for training at Fitzpatrick Referrals, to consolidate learning and provide learners with the opportunity to interact. Each webinar can also count as one hour of CPD. Additionally, nurses have the chance to share their knowledge and experiences, post and answer questions, and widen their contacts within the profession through an online forum.

Additional features

The programme includes videos of operations performed by Noel Fitzpatrick, the founder of Fitzpatrick Referrals, as well as live question and answer sessions. Subscribers also have access to a learning library, which includes resources such as video clips from the modules, templates for nursing documents, kit lists and links to further veterinary nursing material.

‘We recognised that there was not enough CPD available for veterinary nurses, and we know that it can be difficult taking time out of the practice to attend events, so we listened, thought and came up with a solution’, Ms Killner explains.
Ten-minute chat

Chris Laurence retires this month from his role as veterinary director of Dogs Trust. During his time with the charity, he has actively promoted the need for new legislation to replace the Dangerous Dogs Act and was instrumental in the formation of the Dangerous Dogs Act Study Group (DDASG).

How did you get involved with the DDASG?
For many years welfare organisations railed against the injustice of the Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 (DDA), but all the activity had been negative – simply lobbying to get rid of the Act. It seemed to me that negative lobbying would never achieve change, so I initiated a discussion on alternative legislation based on the ASBO system used for antisocial behaviour by people. That led to the formation of the DDASG and the inclusion of a variety of experts, including veterinary expert witnesses, the police and lawyers.

Discussion continued, inevitably at a relatively leisurely pace, for many years, and we eventually came up with the agreed consensus that is now the DDASG’s position, which includes clear opposition to the breed-specific elements (Section 1) of the Act. Unfortunately, with the increase in numbers of so-called status dogs, the police view gradually changed and its use of Section 1 has increased dramatically (the Metropolitan Police alone seized over 1000 dogs last year). They therefore decided to withdraw from the DDASG.

However, on a positive note, Scottish politicians liked the DDASG’s position and, after a lot of liaison with individuals, a Dog Control Bill was introduced as a Private Member’s Bill with government support. The Act was passed in 2010 and came into effect in the spring of this year. Unfortunately, the Scottish Parliament was unable to revoke Section 1 of the DDA, but the preventive actions allowing the issue of Dog Control Notices are now in effect. I live in hope that Westminster will follow Scotland’s lead.

Dog welfare has featured strongly in your career; what made you move from practice to the charity sector?
After 30 years in practice I needed a change of scene. I think most practitioners would agree that general practice is pretty stressful, and it certainly got to me. As I had been an RSPCA Branch President, when the job of RSPCA Chief Veterinary Officer became available, it looked like an ideal match. The change of emphasis certainly rejuvenated me, and I have found working for the RSPCA and subsequently for Dogs Trust to be a very rewarding way of giving something back.

What do you like about your job?
I think it is the weekly variety of tasks that makes working in welfare so interesting. I can be dealing with issues about an individual dog in our care, teaching dog wardens or talking to the EU Commission, all in the same week. It is hard work, but it is also rewarding, and when things come together, such as the Animal Welfare Act, it is fantastic to have had some influence on the outcome.

What do you not like?
The big downside is having to live away from home during the week as it is not practical to work long days and commute from Wiltshire to London. Consequently, I only see home, my wife and pets at weekends, and only then if I don’t have a work commitment.

Why is your job important?
I think I’m hyperactive! I just hate sitting around doing nothing, so work is an important part of my life. But it also has to be mentally fulfilling, and I find the variety of subjects I deal with enormously satisfying.

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career?
One of my most difficult decisions was to give up the stability of a life in practice and start again while taking a pay cut – a sort of leap into the unknown. Looking back, it was probably one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. My advice is to evaluate the risks but follow your heart, and do what you think will satisfy your desires.

What’s the best piece of advice you were ever given?
Make a decision and respect those who also make decisions, even if they turn out to be wrong. Any decision is better than no decision.

What was your proudest moment?
My two trips to Buckingham Palace to collect my Queen’s Volunteer Reserve Medal for my Territorial Army service and my MBE for services to animal welfare, with my wife and children to watch.

. . . and your most painful?
In my first year of practice, I was examining a Japanese squirrel when it sank its teeth into my finger and refused to let go. I’ve never seen one since and have no desire to do so!

She says the programme has been developed by veterinary nurses for veterinary nurses, allowing them to learn when it suits them, so that it doesn’t impact on their normal working day at their practice.

Dr Fitzpatrick adds: “We know that within the veterinary nursing profession, one of the issues is that nurses feel they don’t get the credit they deserve. We wanted to help change that and to empower veterinary nurses by creating a dedicated world-wide veterinary nursing community where nurses can come together, share in the pursuit of knowledge, support each other through the development of social networks and access the most innovative and exciting CPD available.”

The academy plans to develop and release further learning products in different formats for both veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the future. More information is available at www.fitzpatricklearning.com.
Ten-minute chat

Chris Laurence

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