In-house diploma training for veterinary nurses

Goddard Veterinary Group has set up its own college to help its student nurses achieve the diploma in veterinary nursing. As the first group settles in, Helen Farrant, the group’s training manager, explains why it feels the effort is worthwhile.

Setting up our own in-house college has been a big step and has taken a great deal of effort and investment but, as our first cohort settle into their training, it’s great to see their enthusiasm and watch them bond as a team.

The Goddard Veterinary Group (GVG) is a large multicentre practice, encompassing three hospitals and 46 branches in and around London. We employ around 80 registered veterinary nurses (RVNs), 35 student nurses and 70 nursing assistants within the group – a number that has grown significantly over the past 10 years, partly through practice acquisition, but also through a commitment to training within the management team.

The training department is responsible for providing a wide range of training to our staff, including induction training, client care courses, seminars on anaesthesia, correspondence courses on topics such as radiography, and revision courses for VN students. We have delivered the veterinary care assistant (VCA) qualification for a number of years, and branch visits help to provide bespoke training and improve standards consistently.

When the VN qualification was an NVQ, GVG was a veterinary nurse approved centre (VNAC), which meant that we were responsible for our students’ practical training and the completion of their portfolios. At that time, we outsourced the academic teaching on a day-release basis to several colleges. This worked well, but when the qualification became a diploma in 2010, our nurse training had to be outsourced to a variety of further education colleges.

This was not ideal for us. For a start, because of our wide geographical spread, we had to use many colleges, and each had its own systems and approach to training. This meant that training across the group was disjointed and difficult to manage. We also found that it was sometimes hard to secure the information we needed to track students’ progress and that the college days for our students did not always fit in with the needs of the practice. Some branches with nurses in training had to make staffing adjustments that affected their business.

As an experienced RVN and trainer, I was finding it increasingly frustrating that we were losing control of this key aspect of our students’ development – and that our students were being split up. We felt strongly that we wanted to offer them a coherent, consistent training experience that would give them the opportunity to learn together and bond as a team, while being trained to the high standards that we insist on across the practice. So, when Central Qualifications (CQ) was approved as an awarding body and started to offer the VN diploma, we saw an opportunity not just to address the problems with our existing training, but also to raise the bar on the training that we offer to our students.

Setting up the college was a challenge, but with support from the helpful team at CQ, who worked with us to ensure that the action plan has been met, we got there. We...
Ten-minute chat

Laura Muir is a Scottish middle distance runner. She won the 800 m at the UK Indoor Championships in Sheffield on February 9, which earned her a place at the World Indoor Championships in Poland this weekend. She is a third-year vet student at Glasgow.

Was your win a personal best?
I was competing in the British Athletics Indoor Championships with the aim of getting a place on the Great Britain team for the World Indoor Championships, which are being held in Sopot, Poland. Trials races tend to be tactical; I wasn’t running for a personal best but for the win to achieve an automatic qualifying spot. The week previously I managed to break the Scottish national record in the women’s 800 m and I was delighted with the result.

When did you start running?
My parents competed and that sparked my interest. I began running at 11 years old and, as I seemed to be running quite well, I joined a local running club. Regular training began there; each week we would do a couple of track training sessions over shorter distances and I would do a grass or hill session at weekends, with a few runs throughout the week.

During the racing season I compete most weekends. I would have described myself as a mediocre runner before I joined the Glasgow University Athletics Club, where my coach is Andy Young.

How do your training needs and your studies fit together?
In my first two years at vet school I studied full time and fitted my running around it. However, this year I am studying part time. It fits in really well as in third year we study five subjects; I am taking three subjects this year and two next year.

The vet school has been extremely supportive, for which I am very grateful. Studying part time allows me to train six days a week (around three hours a day), and twice on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Friday is my rest day when I have a massage – not a spa-type massage but an injury prevention therapeutic massage. I also have to watch my diet and my weight as they have a bearing on my running ability.

Do you get financial support?
Yes, from Winning Students, Scotland’s sports scholarship programme, which supports students competing in high performance sport. This allows students who also happen to be talented athletes to combine their studies with competing.

The scholarships support more than 150 student athletes and I am lucky enough to be one of them. The Commonwealth Games Development Squad helps with travel expenses through Scottish Athletics. I am also on the World Class Performance Programme funded by the National Lottery. The first year in sport is always tough, but once you’ve proved yourself support is there.

How much travel is involved?
When I started running competitively, most of my races were in Scotland; however, over the past couple of years I have raced all over Europe and in Russia. Travelling is interesting, especially when there is enough time to spend a few hours in a different country. It all depends on the length of the competition and when my races are scheduled as to how much time I get to see anything of the city.

Where will your running take you this year?
I am in Poland now, and fairly soon I will be spending three to four weeks doing warm weather training, possibly in the USA. At some time in the future I will be involved in altitude training, but I’m quite young so I’m not sure how it will affect me. The Commonwealth Games (in Glasgow) are in late July and I have been preselected to run in the 1500 m; it’s pretty special to be involved in a ‘home’ games.

How does it feel to be described by Paul Forsyth in The Scotsman as ‘Scotland’s most exciting prospect in years’?
It does give you a lot of confidence, knowing that people recognise your success and see you as a prospect for the future. It is very exciting and I just hope I can continue training and racing well.

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