Seeking surgical experience abroad

While looking for an EMS placement that would offer some surgical experience, Lillian Cousto, a final-year student at the Royal Veterinary College, stumbled on the opportunity to be involved in a spay and neuter externship offered by Mississippi State University College of Veterinary Medicine in the USA.

The externship programme, which is completely funded through grants and donations, allows students to perform spay and neuter surgeries in a mobile veterinary unit that travels to animal shelters within the state of Mississippi. The students perform these procedures under the guidance and supervision of experienced clinicians and gain surgical experience, while giving back to the community by providing free surgeries to the animal shelters.

Recently, the programme has expanded to two mobile units. This has allowed the university to accept students from other veterinary schools, while also providing free on-campus accommodation and lunches. This unique opportunity seemed an ideal way to gain surgical experience with minimal financial expense apart from the cost of a plane ticket.

With claims of students performing over 100 surgeries during the externship, and being unable to find any similar EMS options locally, I decided to give it a try and I couldn’t have been happier with my choice.

On my first day with the unit, I was immediately asked to get started with a cat spay. Having had little previous surgical experience during my rotations, and having only watched videos of the methods used, I was slightly terrified. However, the clinicians put me at ease and, after I had done one of each (an ovariohysterectomy and neuter – canine and feline) with an instructor scrubbed-in, I was left on my own with the clinicians watching over me to give guidance or scrub-in and help when needed. The instructors were highly skilled, patient and excellent educators.

The mobile clinics were amazing, being equipped with everything you would expect to find in a surgical suite, including multiple surgical tables, each with its own anaesthetic machine. The surgical methods taught are those used in high-volume spay-neuter facilities; although they are highly efficient, they do not cut corners and neither sterility, surgical principles, good technique, nor patient safety are compromised. The externship allowed me to gain surgical experience and confidence, and I learned how to problem-solve when faced with surgical complications should they arise.

Although the externship was mainly surgically focused, we were also given reading materials, videos and a take-home examination on shelter medicine, giving us insight into this field of veterinary medicine and the problems of pet over-population.

The over-population of unwanted pets in the USA is a big problem and many shelters at capacity threshold are forced to euthanase healthy animals or refuse new additions. Spaying and neutering shelter animals gives them a better chance of being adopted. We visited many different shelters and even operated...
on privately owned animals during a community day, with proceeds benefiting the local animal shelter.

This externship was a wonderful opportunity, benefiting the community and the students, and, hopefully, more veterinary schools will follow suit in creating similar programmes for their students and local shelters in the future.

For final-year students looking to improve their surgical skills, I would highly recommend this externship as an EMS placement. More information is available from Jake Shivley, e-mail: jshivley@cvm.msstate.edu

This article also appears in the autumn 2014 issue of the Journal of the Association of Veterinary Students and is published with permission of the editor, Jordan Sinclair.

doi: 10.1136/vr.g6872
Seeking surgical experience abroad

Lillian Cousto

Veterinary Record 2014 175: i-ii
doi: 10.1136/vr.g6872

Updated information and services can be found at:
http://veterinaryrecord.bmj.com/content/175/20/i

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
Student (34)

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/