Diary of a poultry intern

The role of the vet in the poultry industry has never been more diverse, explains William Garton as he embarks on a year’s hands-on poultry internship with the Minster Veterinary Practice.

Why poultry? This is a question put to me by almost everyone I discuss my job with, from my interviewers to my grandmother. It may be the fact that I have kept and reared my own poultry since I was a young boy, or the fact I was one of the few ‘chickengeeks’ in my year group, or perhaps it’s the scope of the industry to grow and the demand for poultry vets that makes this a sensible and promising decision for those with the interest. My internship will demand those bits of my education that I overlooked, such as bacteriology and serological diagnosis, and will expose me to a range of patients from backyard rare breed pet chickens to intensively reared, highly efficient production birds.

My education taught me that veterinary medicine is about principles – relatable and transferable skills that I will need to get me through my first day as a vet. I rely on the principles of a small animal consultation when examining a pet chicken and I need the principles of flock medicine when standing in a shed of 40,000 broilers. As vets we need to be diverse and flexible, and although many will see my chosen role as very specific, I will argue that no matter what discipline you choose, the key is to apply the principles – specialism comes with experience.

The poultry industry remains very much in the public eye with ongoing debates over welfare issues, such as battery farming, and food safety concerns like Campylobacter. The role of the vet in this industry is no longer just clinical; we hold the responsibility of representing and promoting high standards of welfare and the responsible use of antimicrobials. We have the ability to positively engage the public and employ our clinical aptitude to ensure we help to produce a consumable product we can be proud of.

This sector of the profession is innovative and evolving. We are fronting the change for animal welfare and hold sustainability as a priority. I hope to be able to bring to the working professionals a sense of the ongoing need for livestock vets in a developing and growing world economy, where public perception and food safety are paramount to successful industries, but only when combined with evidence-based veterinary and applied common sense principles.

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