Diary of a poultry intern

Christmas is a demanding time for vets working in the poultry industry. As the memory of the season fades, William Garton reflects on his initial four months as a poultry intern.

Seasonal turkey producers, and producers of all other Christmas table birds for that matter, were demanding of our time around the holiday period, with concerns over birds meeting target weights and order numbers. As always, they produced good birds and fulfilled their orders, and we offered them the reassurance and guidance they needed during this hectic spell.

The structured training of my internship continues to complement the exposure to clinical work; in addition to the clinical departments at Minster Vets, there is a training department for all disciplines and levels of the veterinary team and the farming and equine industries.

I recently joined one of the senior poultry vets delivering a day’s hygiene and biosecurity training at a laying hen hatchery. Training delivered to the employees is essential for successful intensive animal production, and the message of biosecurity is paramount when dealing with vulnerable, and valuable, neonates. Although my experiences remain varied, I seem to be developing an interest in free-range layers, breeding sites and hatcheries.

I also spent a day with Ridgeway Biologicals, a manufacturer of emergency autogenous vaccines, to gain an appreciation of how these vaccines are formulated. I learned about the company’s role in intensive livestock production and its value to the prescribing veterinarian and the producer. As we journey into an era pressured to rely less on antimicrobial therapy, the significance of vaccination will become ever more vital; moreover, the specificity of autogenous vaccines allows for the tailored control of farm-specific pathogens. Never has the phrase ‘prevention is better than cure’ been more relevant. The day also helped me achieve an understanding of the influence of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on practising clinicians and the necessity for quality assurance when producing and administering any form of vaccine.

Now that I’m over the ‘first three months hurdle’ of clinical practice, my responsibilities are growing alongside my confidence and knowledge. I find responsibility is both a sense of praise and of achievement; whether it is simply working alone or taking on new clientele, clinical responsibility is an empowering state. As different as poultry practice may be from general practice, the values remain the same, and clinical responsibility is certainly one of those. I have started implementing my own clinical and welfare audits on high-health status breeding farms and have been involved in teaching veterinary students through our association with the University of Nottingham. And, as of the New Year, I joined the out-of-hours rota with my first solo on-call duty. Hold tight until next month to discover how the encounters of that weekend panned out – and what features in a poultry emergency.

On a final note, New Year’s Day was spent at the races where I caught up with some equine clinicians I had seen practice with as a student. As fun as the thrill of the races may be, I definitely made the right decision with poultry – for me at least. Happy New Year.

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