Template for a Recommended Curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success”

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ABSTRACT
Recent studies of the veterinary profession have established a need for training in various areas beyond those directed toward building competence and proficiency as a clinician. To address this need, a workshop was designed whose objective was to develop a detailed outline of a model curriculum that would encompass the skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes deemed essential for economic success in the veterinary profession. The model curriculum was created from comprehensive input provided by consultants and educators. Constraints for implementation of this curriculum are identified, and future directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION
To become successful as a veterinary practitioner, the veterinarian must be an accomplished, able, informed, thoughtful, and caring clinician. Several recent studies, however, have provided a strong indication that many veterinarians, although clinically competent, may lack some of the crucial skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes (SKAs) that typically are correlated with, and may be essential for, their economic success. This may be especially true as they enter private practice, but many of these attributes also apply to any of the range of careers that exist in the veterinary profession. Such concerns were the basis for one of the key findings of the KPMG “Mega Study,” whose 17-page executive summary (of the 700-page report), entitled “The Current and Future Market for Veterinarians and Veterinary Medical Services in the United States,” was published in mid-1999.

The conclusions of the concurrent Brakke study were similar. This work provided evidence that many veterinarians were not earning up to their potential because they lacked skill and aptitudes in some of the key determinants of success, such as business acumen, financial expertise, and the ability and self-image to apply their veterinary services. Confirmation of these conclusions from the KPMG and Brakke studies has been provided more recently by two outcomes assessment surveys conducted in North Carolina and California. These studies assessed the competencies of recent veterinary graduates from the perspective of practicing veterinarians. In both studies, the groups of graduates evaluated were generally perceived as being well prepared in their clinical skills, but were frequently deemed deficient in the SKAs encompassing veterinary practice management and communication.

To address the problems identified by the KPMG study, the National Commission on Veterinary Economic Issues (NCVEI) has been established. Of NCVEI’s several working groups, one was formed to study the SKAs that are correlated with economic and professional success, and also to answer the question, If veterinarians do not currently have these skills, how can we as a profession see that they are incorporated into our professional culture? NCVEI meetings in Michigan, North Carolina, and California have been conducted to begin developing a consensus of what SKAs are needed for the veterinary professional to be successful, especially in practice, and to deliberate about how and where to implement change. One of the outcomes of this series of meetings has been an expanded realization that the desired attributes necessary for veterinarians’ professional success can be obtained through careful selection of individuals who are admitted to the profession, appropriate training post-admission, or both.

Two recent studies have begun to address the issue of what is and should be taught to veterinary students about veterinary practice management. One study found that most Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) member colleges have a practice management course. In about half of these schools this course is required, and about 86% of 1999 veterinary graduates had taken a course in “practice management.” The courses that were taken, however, varied widely in form and content, as well as in the backgrounds of the faculty who taught them. Much of the emphasis in these courses (up to 100% in some cases) was on law and ethics, with less time (or none) spent on marketing, personnel management, financial management, or personal management. A follow-up study was directed toward assessing the needs from the perspectives of experts in veterinary practice management, both consultants and teachers. The emphasis was on defining the nature and content of practice management, education that DVM students should receive, along with identifying a future direction for this teaching. In addition to creating an initial outline of the educational needs, the study found a strong interest in collaboration between teachers and consultants in practice management. It was noted, however, that any substantial change in existing educational programs would require strong support from veterinary school faculties and administrations.

These studies clearly indicate that we must expand the horizons of what is required to be a successful veterinary practitioner and that a broader set of SKAs must be attained in addition to becoming an accomplished, knowledgeable, and able clinician. In the late 1980s, a “Model Curriculum for Teaching Veterinary Management” was developed by a group chaired by Dr. Jack Mara of Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Inc. This curriculum addressed many of the SKAs in the broader set. However, because of substantial changes in veterinary medicine and the business world, a rapid rate of change in medical knowledge and information...
technology, and a heightened awareness resulting from the KPMG study and related work, an update of Mara report was deemed essential. Using the Mara report as a foundation, a workshop of veterinary practice management educators and consultants was designed with the primary objective of defining a core curriculum for veterinary education that would develop a minimally acceptable skill set in the area broadly referred to as “veterinary practice management.” A secondary objective was to initiate and foster active professional interaction among and between the participating educators and consultants. The purpose of this article is to present the resulting template for a curriculum that would achieve this broader set of SKAs essential for career success. This template is not intended to serve as the outline for a single course but, rather, to define the breadth of areas in which competency should be achieved.

METHODS
The workshop to define a curriculum in veterinary professional development and career success was held at Michigan State University on October 26–28, 2001. The meeting was attended by 38 participants from across North America: 16 were veterinary school faculty, many with administrative responsibilities, representing 14 North American veterinary schools; 18 were from practice management consulting firms and/or prominent veterinary organizations; and four were business school faculty.

The particular meeting date was selected to coincide with a student forum, sponsored by the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA), entitled “From School to Success: Shaping the Future of Your Veterinary Career.” Although the programs for these two conferences were largely separate, several opportunities were included for active, structured interaction and exchange of ideas between the students and the educators/consultants. As a result, the consultants and educators attending the curriculum workshop had a unique opportunity to interact with, and be influenced by, approximately 250 students from the Ohio State University, Purdue University, the University of Wisconsin—Madison, the University of Minnesota, and Michigan State University.

An emeritus professor of educational administration, especially experienced in curricular development and group facilitation, carefully developed the structure of the workshop and guided its progression. To assure widespread input and communication of ideas, sessions included an appropriate mixture of large- and small-group meetings. Small-group discussions were purposefully structured to be at times composed of those with a predominantly homogeneous disciplinary background, and at other times include participants with heterogeneous interests, expertise, and experience.

The program was initiated by a sequence of presentations and discussions by several panels, each with distinctive perspectives from which to examine a core curriculum in practice management and the minimal skill set that entry-level veterinarians need. These groups included a panel of veterinary school academic deans; a panel of practice management consultants; a panel of those leading the NCVEI initiative; and a panel of faculty from the Michigan State University (MSU) College of Business (all of whom have been active faculty participants in MSU’s Practice Manage-
4. being prepared for and managing the interview — critical bi-directional information flow
5. strategies for long-distance vs. short-distance job searches

D. Personal/professional considerations regarding practice job selection
1. identifying your own vision/mission and matching it with that of the practice at which you have chosen to work
2. availability of a mentoring environment
3. presence, absence, and/or types of medical protocols/standards for treatment/surgery
4. determining how the practice’s philosophy about euthanasia (convenience, etc.), ear crops, declawing, and other optional procedures fits with yours
5. negotiation factors
   a. salary (production-based compensation — pros and cons; time value of money, current compensation requirements)
   b. contract (terms, content, negotiations, and legal implications of the first employment contract)
   c. benefits (life, health, disability, professional liability, and pet insurance; continuing education, sick/personal leave, and vacation)
   d. job description (formal or informal)
   e. added value (personal growth potential)

II. Basic Life Skills for the Successful Veterinarian

Ensuring that the fundamentals are in place for success

A. Goal setting and planning
   1. development of written personal goals/objectives
   2. significance of long- vs. short-term goals
   3. implementing action plans to fulfill goals
   4. behavior modification to attain goals
   5. review and modification of goals
   6. budgeting as a goal

B. Emotional intelligence
   1. What is it and how does it differ from IQ?
   2. Why is it important?
   3. Can it be learned or is it innate, like one’s IQ?
   4. applications of personality profiles (Myers-Briggs, etc.) to EI
   5. developing and maintaining self-esteem (individual definition of success)
   6. stress and time management

C. Professionalism
   1. What is it? Why is it important?
   2. expected behavior of a professional with staff, colleagues, and clients

D. Teamwork
   1. responsibilities as members of teams
   2. creating successful teams
   3. the art of delegating and accepting responsibility and authority

E. Managing a career
   1. matching goals and achievements to expectations
   2. future planning, recognizing critical hurdles
   3. identifying and tracking personal, professional, and financial success

F. Maintaining competence
   1. access routes to current information
   2. adopting a philosophy of lifelong learning
   3. where and when to go for professional vs. career information
   4. adopting the philosophy and practice of continuing education
   5. the role of information management software

G. Achieving a balance between one’s career, financial success, and personal life
   1. establishing life balance goals
   2. family needs and values
   3. handling conflicts between personal, family, and business goals
   4. professional and community involvement
   5. changing goals with age, altered personal circumstances, and changing business circumstances
   6. personal financial management and planning (budget preparation, future income potential, debt management, investment and retirement planning, tax planning and liabilities)
   7. insurance (crisis management and the roles of medical, disability, life, and professional liability insurance)

III. The Art of Successful Communication

Effective communication is presenting what you have to say in a way that conveys the message you intended to send, and likewise to ensure that the message you receive is what the sender intended for you to hear.

A. Understanding why effective communication is important
B. Knowing and defining your audience
   1. audience profiles (clients, peers/colleagues, business and technical staff, employer/faculty/business owner, employees, external business contacts — financial advisors, suppliers, associations, governmental/administrative, media, non-veterinary com-
munity groups, family, communication in an educational setting)
2. recognizing audience attributes (education and position of recipient, DVM vs. non-DVM, boss vs. employee, cultural and educational background, gender, possible barriers including language and disability)
3. methods of communication (phone, written, oral, electronic, body language and personal appearance)
4. essential communication differences with individual, small–group, and large-group audiences

C. Principles of communication—how to build trust and rapport
1. structure of effective communication (having a goal before beginning; planning a beginning, middle, and end)
2. time efficient communication — timing of communication
3. awareness of different communication and personality styles on successful communication (e.g., Blanchard, Myers-Briggs)
4. awareness of learning styles (e.g., visual, verbal, storytelling)
5. implications of vocabulary/terminology for effective communication
6. understanding and developing the environment for effective communication (room, noise, distractions, lighting, moods, seating, temperature)
7. active listening (ensuring recipient understands your message, soliciting feedback, understanding recipient verbal and nonverbal response and feedback, modifying style in response)
8. communication aids (visual, video, handouts, models, etc.)
9. effective writing (understanding the reader, writing for multiple readers with different levels of communication needs, the essential structures of written documents)

D. Situational use of communication principles
1. the art of negotiation—techniques and skills
2. problem solving
3. conflict resolution and/or management
4. facilitating the decision-making process
5. facilitating the learning process
6. giving and receiving criticism
7. job search communication (résumé writing, interviewing, preparation and follow-up)
8. record-keeping (medical records for business, diagnostic, and legal defense reasons, research records, financial records)

9. seeking funding for research and entrepreneurial activities—the art of grant writing
10. marketing materials (newsletters, client info sheets, publications)
11. private practice applications (grief counseling, communicating in emotionally charged settings, discussing money matters with clients)
12. education (clients, staff, other groups)
13. outcome-dependent styles of communication (information flow, group problem solving, group learning)

E. Responsibilities of communication
1. communication with clients (communication attitudes and commitment to service; estimates, risks, prognostics, and authorization to treat; appropriate use of medical records; grief counsel/human–companion animal bond; practice newsletters, reminders, surveys)
2. communication with employees (letter of application and resumes; interviews, employment reviews; performance appraisal; termination)
3. communication with colleagues (positive idea exchange; confrontation over differences; editorial forums; local, state, national associations)
4. communication with others (community relations, media, legislators, city offices, service clubs, kennel/cattery groups, producer groups, humane groups, sales representatives)

IV. Ethical Values and Responsibilities and Their Application in Veterinary Careers

A. Ethical theory
1. detecting ethical questions in the first place
2. basis of ethical decisions and making choices
3. nature of ethical theory (consequentialist theories stressing goodness and badness, i.e., the results of people’s actions, including utilitarianism; deontological theories stressing rightness and wrongness, i.e., the intrinsic properties of actions, including theologically based actions that are obligatory because they have been commanded by God)
4. breaking ethics into its components (social consensus ethics—binding on all members of society; personal ethics—determined at the discretion of the individual; professional ethics—pertaining to one’s role as a veterinarian)
5. case examples of moral duties and ethical concerns (clients’ requests for convenience euthanasia, less than optimal care, pro bono care, treatment of the vicious animal, non-sterile surgery)
6. utilizing the AVMA’s Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics as the principal document upon which individuals build
B. Professional responsibilities

1. Personal integrity
   a. testing knowledge and factual base/seeking consultations
   b. understanding “conflicts of interest” and being aware of situations in which conflicts may exist or appear to exist (e.g., veterinarian representing buyers/sellers of animals, pharmaceutical or food company payments/reimbursements/gifts, understanding possible clients’ views of whether recommendations are “tainted” by such, corporate shareholder interests vs. client/pet interests)

2. Responsibility to animals
   a. understanding humane care
   b. understanding the issues surrounding animal rights
   c. animal welfare
      i. companion animal welfare
      ii. farm/food animal welfare (i.e., the uses of animals for human sustenance)
      iii. use and welfare of animals in research and teaching (e.g., teaching anatomy and surgery, balancing between terminal and non-terminal surgeries, non-live-animal alternatives)
      iv. the concept of pain
   d. responsibilities to the animal of ownership

3. Provision of service
   a. When is there a responsibility to provide care?
   b. accurate descriptions of clinical situation
   c. maintaining competence-seeking referrals
   d. truth in advertising

4. Role of the DVM in human health
   a. guardian of human health
   b. human/animal bond

C. Professional interactions

1. Responsibility to clients
   a. confidentiality
   b. respecting client trust
   c. understanding “full disclosure” and its ramifications (e.g., client agreement to treat in light of education about potential side effects; reasons and need for waivers and release statements; disclosures of potential conflicts of interest; disclosure of care animal is to receive, e.g., whether on-site attendants are at the facility all night)
   d. awareness of pitfalls associated with “treatment guarantees”

2. balancing the responsibility to clients and patients

3. responsibilities in professional peer interactions (consultation, referrals, colleague relationships)
4. responsibility to employees and as an employee
5. responsibility to the community

V. The Art and Knowledge for a Successful Veterinary Practice

Understanding the structure of a successful practice is as important for choosing where to work as it is in creating one.

A. Business fundamentals—the structure and management of a successful business

1. business structures (sole proprietorship, partnerships, corporations, LLCs, mergers and consolidations)
2. the management process (plan, implement, evaluate, monitor)
3. strategic management (organizing, directing, delegating, and control)
4. efficiency and resource utilization—including personnel and time
5. provision of service
6. growth phases of a practice (basic decisions on when growth should be added)
7. building the external team (using consultants to advise on legal, business, and medical decisions)
8. setting up the referral bases (incoming and outgoing)
9. physical plant and capital equipment

B. Marketing and promotion

1. Who is the customer? What does the customer need? What is the role of marketing in private practice?
2. how to meet customer needs (4 Ps—place, product, promotion, price)
3. developing a marketing plan (determining price and fee structure, perception of value and benefits to clients, identifying profit centers, determining “market mix,” client education of services provided, service as tangible product)
4. product differentiation (branding, etc.)
5. role of the human–animal bond in the concept of service and marketing
6. promotion and image (impact of building appearance both inside and outside to clients, selling service benefits, projecting a caring attitude by staff, differentiating your practice from others, ensuring full communication with clients, perception of value by clients)
7. marketing techniques
C. Practice location
1. principles of demographics (psychographics of your targeted clients)
2. prominence of location within the community (relative location to other practitioners and services)
3. need and demand for veterinary services

D. The fiscal enterprise
1. Economics
   a. supply/demand functions
   b. elasticity of demand
   c. understanding interest rates
   d. opportunity costs
2. Financial management and control
   a. the “culture of business” (what is value, definition of “money,” time value of money/present value/future value calculations, how markets work)
   b. budget process/decision making as a management tool
   c. budget management and oversight (planning, organizing, directing, control)
   d. income statement/balance sheet (revenue records, expense records, fixed and variable costs)
   e. time-dependent income and expenditure flow
   f. internal and external control—what? why?
   g. employee salaries (production-based compensation, value of knowledge)
   h. employer compensation—where does the money come from?
   i. federal and state laws, regulations, and requirements
3. Accounting
   a. bookkeeping (revenue records and IRS requirements, accrual vs. cash gross income, credits and discounts, cash controls, expense and payroll records, banking, financial statements and economic analysis, income statement)
   b. financial analysis (sources of “standard” veterinary practice ratios, identifying “normal” ratios for an individual practice, evaluating trends in practice performance over time, accounting for inflation)
   c. credit and collections (credit as a tool of management, implementing and monitoring a credit policy, collection approaches)

E. Managing human resources
1. Organizational IQ
   a. working with others (behavioral style awareness, organizational culture and work ethic, communication style, personality styles, intent versus impact, dress/appearance, responsible employer/employee relationships)
   b. establishing and maintaining trust (political style and savvy, team work, delegation and leverage of staff, staff empowerment, avoiding confrontation management, listening and communication, earning respect, motivating others, defining the outcome, the hierarchy of needs [Maslow], staff recognition)
   c. leveraging the paraprofessional
2. Organizational flexibility
   a. planning ahead for family leave (maternity, childcare, eldercare, etc.), short-term disability leave, absences for continuing education, sabbatical
   b. planning ahead for work interruptions
   c. continuity in care and client communications in situations with multiple veterinarians and support staff
   d. part-time employment and emergency staff
   e. creating a team (the art of delegation)
3. Organizational systems
   a. job descriptions (What are they and how are they optimally used?)
   b. process for hiring
   c. personnel management and performance reviews
   d. procedures for discipline/firing
   e. policies and procedures manual (What is it? How to use it—not just a legal document.)
   f. established procedures for crisis management (medical/surgical, client, staff)
   g. state and federal employment law

F. Record keeping
1. medical—for provision of care, generating revenue, and legal defense
2. inventory and inventory control

G. Essential legal knowledge
1. differentiating moral, ethical, and legal constraints on the practice of veterinary medicine
2. understanding the licensing process (laws and regulations governing the practice of veterinary medicine; national and state board examinations; regulations governing the activities of registered veterinary technicians and unregistered assistants)
3. animals and the law (animals as property—new statutes and case law precedents that are changing the status of pets, animal confinement and licensing
laws, animals as a nuisance, rabies vaccination and quarantine laws, liability for animal bites and improper restraint, abandonment vs. animal lien laws, the application of anti-cruelty laws, dealing with dangerous dogs, legal protections for livestock owners, laws governing wild vs. domestic animals, the veterinarian's public health role)

4. Professional liability
   a. minimizing client complaints and settling disputes (assessing causes of complaints; factors aggravating the potential for complaints; minimizing complaints by communication, courtesy, caring, compassion, and compromise)
   b. avenues for addressing grievances (state and local VMA ethics and peer review committees, state boards of examiners, courts of law, arbitration)
   c. understanding the elements of a legal action for negligence or malpractice (legal duty; standards of care for generalists vs. specialists; establishing proximate causation and damages; changes in the law regarding emotional distress damages for pets)
   d. legal duty to refer or offer referrals
   e. doctrine of informed consent (use of client consent forms to help achieve informed consent—are they required?)
   f. liability insurance coverage
   g. defenses to legal actions

5. Contract law and its applicability to veterinary medicine
   a. legal elements of a valid contract (offer, meeting of the minds, implied or express acceptance, problems determining who has the capacity to form a contract, consideration)
   b. contract between veterinarian and client (veterinarian–client–patient relationship as a contract; can it be broken—how?)
   c. defining and understanding the legal requirements of a valid veterinarian–client–patient relationship (client consent considerations)
   d. statutes of frauds
   e. restrictive covenants

6. employment law (basic payroll deductions and employment record-keeping requirements, employer liability for acts of employees, civil rights considerations for job applicants and employees, employer responsibility for a safe and healthy work place, the legal risks of a wrongful termination)

7. Legal use of veterinary drugs
   a. defining categories of drugs (FDA approved vs. unapproved drugs, FDA definitions for adulterated and misbranded drugs, extra-label use of drugs, guidelines for compounding of drugs, over-the-counter [OTC] drugs, prescription drugs prohibited for use in food-producing animals; controlled drugs and substances, role of the DEA)
   b. labeling and packaging requirements
   c. veterinarians’ rights to render non-standard forms of treatment
   d. legal use of biologics and pesticides
   e. liability when dealing with dangerous drugs

8. legal requirements surrounding medical records (medical record confidentiality, the admissibility of medical records under the business exception rules of evidence in a court of law, criteria for admitting manually produced and electronically produced business and medical records, likelihood of cases settling because of inadequate records, ownership/theft/transfer/loss and retention of medical records and radiographs)

H. How to evaluate a practice for sale
   1. goals of the buyer and seller
   2. value of real estate, professional equipment, office furnishings and equipment, inventory
   3. value of goodwill and medical records
   4. assessing income potential

I. Why businesses fail

VI. Understanding Leadership: Leadership as a Pathway for Success
Why become a leader—is it essential for success?
Understanding and developing leadership skills to be effective.

A. Leadership
   1. What is a leader? (characteristics, the difference between a leader and a manager, formal vs. informal leadership)
   2. stages of leadership (from team to business owner to corporate CEO)
   3. styles of leadership (leading versus displaying authority, situational leadership, rising to a position of leadership)
   4. ethical responsibility of being a leader
   5. responsibilities and opportunities that leadership can create

B. Becoming a leader
   1. know yourself first (behavior/temperament assessment, intent—impact—behavior, adaptability, seeing yourself as a leader)
   2. leadership and emotional intelligence (ability to work with others, effectiveness in leading others, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, social skills, recognizing and knowing others' needs/motivation/rewards)
3. leadership—followership (direction and vision at the top of the pyramid, implementation from the bottom of the pyramid, interchangeable roles
4. finding a mentor

C. Being a leader
1. improving what is and creating what isn’t—simultaneously
2. creating a vision (why, the grand view, the role of a leader in creating a vision for the team or organization, helping empower others to create the vision)
3. establishing a mission (What’s the purpose?)
4. understanding core values
5. moving in new and maybe unexpected directions—moving out of the confines of old thinking
6. goal setting (how will we get it done, how to set goals for yourself and others, how to measure success)
7. implementation plans/strategies
8. interactive process (reviewing plans, building upon them, acting to change or improve goals; assessment—praise—redirection)
9. communicating as a leader (providing feedback, listening and responding)
10. serving as a mentor

D. Outcome of effective leadership
1. producing excellence and change
2. implementing new directions and strategies
3. reinvigorating a business

E. How leaders are evaluated

DISCUSSION
Reflecting the views that have now been presented in several venues,1–7, 9 and especially by the KPMG1 and Brakke2 reports, the participants who created this template for a curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” likewise concurred that veterinarians are most likely to be able to provide a higher quality of clinical care if they are also economically successful. Enjoying such success generally allows the veterinarian greater latitude in approaching clinical problems, thereby increasing the likelihood of effectiveness. When a practice is economically successful, it is able to provide a more consistent level of quality care. Being fiscally successful, therefore, enables the veterinarian and the veterinary profession to sustainably and more effectively meet society’s demands on the profession. It is therefore necessary for veterinarians to embrace good business principles to best benefit the welfare of their patients, the interests of animal owners, and society in general. Although the emphasis by the participants at the workshop was on entry-level associate practitioners, a large proportion of the suggested curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” was viewed as vital for success for all graduating veterinarians, independent of their career path. If the profession as a whole is more economically successful, this will help ensure that the best and the brightest will continue to be attracted to careers in veterinary medicine.

Curriculum
The outline developed by the panel of workshop participants (see note a) is a suggested curriculum, not the suggested contents of a single course. It has been created to provide guidance in the design of the overall veterinary degree, sets of courses, and individual courses. One of the intended applications of the outline is for faculties to use it as a template to evaluate their curriculum in the area of practice management and career success skills, to highlight deficiencies that need to be rectified, and thus to prompt curricular change. Parts of the defined professional development/career success curriculum can and should occur in many different courses, and it will often be best to integrate specific components throughout the professional education program. Schools will need to be innovative and look for teachable moments, and they will need to build the program within their own curriculum’s opportunities and constraints. Many of the topics are suitably, and often more effectively, taught in circumstances where there is immediate practical application. These might best be integrated into context-based activities such as management of veterinary teaching hospitals and/or private practice externship settings. Other topics might be addressed through a co-curricular, or executive training, approach (the course is ungraded, but students must complete it to get credit/certificate). On a school-by-school basis, faculty will need to debate which portions of the defined curriculum are (should be) core/required and which are (should be) elective.

The stage at which an individual should assimilate the entire scope of SKAs presented in this proposed curriculum is open to debate and will also need to be judged school by school. As with clinical knowledge and skills, learning the principles of professional development and career success, and the continued reinforcement of these principles, should be a lifelong process rather than stopping at graduation. For both, the base of knowledge should be set during the undergraduate veterinary education. Likewise for both, it should be expected that there will be a crucial six-month to two-year period when the base achieved in veterinary school will be built upon in substantial ways. Further, knowledge and skills must be reinforced with continuing education throughout the veterinary career. Thus, the curriculum that has been defined here is intended to serve as a guide to both pre- and post-DVM education, and not only to help veterinary school faculty shape courses and experiences within the DVM curriculum. It should also provide a guide-line to those providing continuing education in these areas. Most importantly, this defined curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” should be used by individual veterinarians as a guide for areas outside of clinical knowledge in which they must be skilled to be fully successful.

Constraints
Many constraints clearly exist that may impede the implementation of such a program in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success.” One of the most challenging of these constraints is the enormous amount of material already covered in all professional veterinary cur-
rricula. Innovative opportunities will need to be identified, and faculties will need to debate the issue of “What is core?” A second and related concern is the level of existing faculty expertise in and attitudes toward these topics. Ideally, the faculty would model the skills in addition to teaching them, but achieving this ideal may be difficult. Developing an effective delivery system for the suggested material may also be a challenge, and the potential applicability of technology to enhance teaching should be evaluated. When considering the resource constraints to obtain faculty expertise and/or develop appropriate teaching technology, workshop participants explored whether or not corporate support would be available or appropriate.

Substantial curricular changes can be extremely difficult to achieve, and faculty support is essential for any major alterations. It will be essential to nurture all veterinary faculty into understanding and supporting the basis of this current proposal. To build this support, workshop participants suggested that the “culture clash” between medicine and business must first be recognized and addressed. In this regard, it will be important to emphasize how the success of the veterinary business often directly determines both the quality of the medicine that is feasible and the success of the individuals involved. This is certainly true for the private practitioner, and it is becoming increasingly relevant for attending clinicians in veterinary teaching hospitals.

A third constraint in implementing this proposed curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” is the students’ acceptance that an understanding of such issues as business management is important to them as they train to become veterinarians and health care providers. It should not be assumed that students will automatically see the relevance of these issues. When students are faced with the need to grasp the entire breadth of veterinary medicine in four short years, their inconsistent interest in these topics is not surprising. Students must be guided to see the relevance of these areas as critical for their future success. Based on the fact that female students may be somewhat less likely to have practice ownership as a career objective,1 workshop participants considered the possibility that a gender difference may exist in this regard. Although it was agreed that the SKAs are vital across the veterinary profession, some career paths may hold greater challenges. Because of their direct involvement in the production aspects of the livestock industries, many of the topics in the curriculum were viewed as being even more vital for graduates entering food animal careers. Re-evaluation of admissions or pre-veterinary requirements so that the students come to veterinary school with a broader perspective on the many facets of veterinary medicine might be a viable solution to gain student interest. Perhaps it might be reasonable to expect that some of the SKAs actually be acquired prior to entry into the veterinary curriculum. Student interest can be a powerful stimulus for changing faculty perspectives.

Added Benefits

In addition to development of the model curriculum, a number of additional benefits were derived from the meeting with regard to veterinary education. Educators and consultants in attendance at this symposium had a critical opportunity to influence the academic training and economic success of future veterinarians in their specific areas of interest and/or expertise: veterinary career development and practice management. In addition, they had an important chance to network both within and between groups, facilitating communication regarding the availability of expertise in these disciplines and providing much-needed support from individuals who generally face similar professional challenges to their own. Both of these features stand to strengthen educational programs.

Future Directions

Curriculum change faces many dilemmas. The first is to have a proposed new curriculum accepted, which in most cases is dependent not upon documentation that it will achieve its end goal but far more upon persuasion that the change is needed to correct a problem. The rationale for acceptance of the proposed curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” is based upon documentation of a need for change rather than on documentation that what is proposed will achieve the needed correction, although, in the judgment of the workshop participants, this curriculum should achieve its expected results. To achieve continued and full implementation, it will be critical to document as early as possible that the curriculum is achieving its desired goal and that graduates who have had the benefit of this training achieve a higher level of “success” in the veterinary profession.

Specific suggestions across the full range of persuasion, implementation, and assessment included the following:

1. Work with student organizations to develop a grass-roots constituency. Possible approaches included the SAVMA house of delegates, upcoming “School-to-Success” conferences, and the annual SCAVMA symposium.

2. Collaborate with the NCVEI to achieve visibility and broad-based support across the veterinary profession. Develop a press release through NCVEI and, possibly, a Web site.

3. Seek additional methods to publicize the work. Include both a broad base of private practitioners and academic administrators in AAVMC member institutions as primary targets.

4. Study measures of success to document that graduates with this type of training are more likely to achieve success in the veterinary profession.

5. Develop liaison with the Association of Veterinary Practice Management Consultants and Advisors to garner both their input and their support.

6. Consider additional meetings in the future to help fine-tune the recommended curriculum and to work together on overcoming constraints.

Those who have prepared this proposed curriculum believe that for the profession to continue to attract the “best and the brightest,” adequate financial rewards are essential. If fully implemented, it is believed that this model curriculum will help bring the veterinary profession the economic base that is essential to continued improvement in the quality of veterinary care, which is indeed and should remain the profession’s primary mission.
NOTE

Workshop participants convened to create the template for a recommended curriculum in “Veterinary Professional Development and Career Success” included Dr. Sarah Abood, Michigan State University; Dr. Mimi Arighi, Purdue University; Dr. Jeremy Bailey, University of Saskatchewan; Dr. Dave Barbee, Washington State University; Dr. Alison Barber, Michigan State University (business); Dr. Gary Burge, National PetCare Centers, Inc.; Dr. Brent Calhoun, Michigan Veterinary Specialists; Dr. Ronald Cott, University of Missouri; Mr. Roger Cummings, CVPM, Brakke Consulting, Inc. Dr. Robert Deegan, Veterinary Practice Consultants; Dr. David Goodnight, Veterinary Pet Insurance; Dr. Donna Harris, Veterinary Special Services; Dr. Lawrence Heider, University of Prince Edward Island; Dr. Howard Hickey, Michigan State University (emeritus); Dr. Tom Kendall, Arden Animal Hospital, Inc.; Dr. Lonnie J. King, Michigan State University; Ms. Terri Krantz, American Animal Hospital Association; Dr. Michael Mazzeo, Michigan State University (business); Dr. Carol Mase, Life Work Design; Dr. John McCarthy, McCarthy Associates, Inc.; Dr. Rebecca McComas, University of Minnesota; Dr. Dennis McCurnin, Louisiana State University; Dr. Joseph McManus, Tufts University; Dr. Michael Moch, Michigan State University (business); Dr. Laura Molgaard, University of Minnesota; Dr. Charles Neer, Ohio State University; Dr. A. Wendell Nelson, Colorado State University; Dr. Kathleen Neuhoff, President-Elect, AAHA; Dr. Glenn Omura, Michigan State University (business); Mr. Howard Rubin, NCVEI; Dr. Peggy Rucker, NCVEI Work Group on Gender Issues; Dr. Roger Saltman, Pharmacia Animal Health; Dr. Carin Smith, Smith Veterinary Services; Dr. James P. Thompson, University of Florida; Dr. John Van Vleet, Purdue University; Dr. Jim Wilson, Priority Veterinary Consulting; and the two authors of this report.

REFERENCES


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