

Veterinary Council of Ireland

Official Guidelines for New or Returning Graduates and their Employers

Introduction

Newly qualified veterinary practitioners and veterinary nurses, graduates returning to work after a career break and graduates commencing work in a new and different area of practice require special support for a period of time in their new job. It is important that these graduates/registrants are facilitated and supported so that they can develop further their day 1 graduation competencies in a structured, progressive manner. Consequently they will be able to deal more confidently and successfully with a variety of common case presentations and procedures. This will be of benefit to the clients of the practice, the graduate, the employer and the other members of the practice.

At present the level of support available to new graduates varies considerably from practice to practice. The purpose of these guidelines is to ensure that a standard foundation level of support exists throughout the country and it is a requirement of the Veterinary Council that these guidelines be implemented by employers and new graduates.

Employer Guidelines

Induction

The employer or a suitably qualified designate such as an experienced (defined as 5 years full time relevant experience) veterinary practitioner, nurse or practice manager should meet with the graduate before work commences and outline to them the various protocols involved in the day to day running of the particular practice. Examples of protocols include the duty rota, customer service procedures, laboratory sampling/handling procedures, billing protocols and so on. These protocols must not contain any illegal or unethical procedures nor must they compromise the integrity or professionalism of the graduate. Ideally these protocols should be clearly written or contained in an accessible sitemaster type file.

Contract of employment and Health and Safety

All employees must be provided with a written statement of terms and conditions governing their employment within 2 months of commencing employment as per Terms of Employment Act 1994-2001. This contract governs the relationship between the employer and employee. It outlines the duties and responsibilities of both parties and is important should any disagreements develop. Its most important benefit is to help prevent problems and disputes occurring in the first place as each party is aware of its duties and responsibilities from the outset.

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Health and Safety at work is covered by several different pieces of legislation with the most relevant being the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005. Both employers and employees have responsibilities for health and safety at work. All modern health and safety legislation is based upon the concept of risk assessment and management and the provision of a regularly reviewed, up to date safety statement is a central part of this legislation

Support

The support given to graduates is broadly divided into 2 categories.

(1) Technical and Communication Support. This is usually given by the demonstration and explanation of technical procedures and via advice relevant to the day to day dealings with clients and other practice team members.

(2) Moral and Psychological support. This is often necessary for the graduate dealing with issues, situations and relationships that they find particularly distressing and it can be given by an experienced, trained and (often) external mentor.

Technical and communication support is arranged by the practice employing the new graduate. Graduates should be supervised performing the more complex regular procedures that they come across until both graduate and employer or designate are satisfied they are competent and confident to do so. Examples of these procedures for veterinary practitioners include ovariohysterectomies, caesarean sections, prolapsed wombs, GDV in bitches. It may not be necessary to supervise each individual procedure but at a minimum an experienced veterinary practitioner must be available to give immediate advice over the phone and must be available to call out and provide on the spot assistance as necessary. In cases where a veterinary practitioner from the employing practice is unavailable an arrangement with a neighbouring practice must be in place to provide this support. Ideally a written duty roster indicating which experienced vet is providing this support should be maintained and this roster is especially relevant for out of hours support.

The new veterinary practitioner graduate should experience and have primary responsibility for a wide range of first opinion cases and procedures. It may be necessary to alter the normal practice distribution of calls, consults and procedures to enable the new graduate gain this experience.

Both veterinary and non-veterinary personnel working in the Practice must be aware of their responsibilities towards the new graduate. The support of the new graduate should be very much a team endeavour and communication between all members of the practice is a vital part of this undertaking. It will lead to a better working environment for all concerned and ensure a more rapid progression of the graduates competence and confidence.

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The cases and procedures performed by the graduate should be regularly reviewed by an experienced vet or vet nurse as appropriate and discussed with the graduate. Ideally a weekly time period should be set aside for this discussion. The overall work performance of the graduate should be reviewed using modern performance appraisal techniques and templates at a less regular interval – Six or twelve monthly timescales are more appropriate in this instance and these standardised techniques are often found to be useful for other employees in the practice.

Moral and psychological support of the new graduate dealing with stressful clients or situations may be best given by a trained mentor. Mentoring is about helping people to make their own choices by suggesting options to them. It is a relationship between two parties, ideally unconnected in a line management structure, in which one party (the mentor) guides the other (the mentee) through a period of change (Kay and Hinds, 2009). The Veterinary Council hopes to set up a mentoring scheme whereby new graduates will have access to a trained mentor. These mentors may provide support from a distance, may not be a member of the practice in which the graduate is working and thus may not be involved in any way in the day to day running of the practice. Therefore it is vital that those working in the Practice with the new graduate provide adequate moral and communicative support also. This is particularly important when dealing with difficult clients and the graduate must be supported in their decisions and treatment options unless the other team members feel strongly and conclusively that an incorrect decision has been made. It is not acceptable for the reputation of the graduate to be compromised to save the reputation of the practice, for financial gain or in an effort to retain the business of a client.

Finally graduates must be given ample opportunity to partake in Continuing Veterinary Education (CVE) and to obtain their mandatory CVE points as necessary. The practice should have a standard protocol for CVE which can be outlined in the graduate's contract of employment at the outset. Graduates should be encouraged to undertake CVE and to become involved in local and national veterinary organisations. Participation in CVE and veterinary organisations will help the new graduate become more easily integrated in to the wider veterinary profession and community.

New Graduate Guidelines

Graduates must accept the fact that although they are fully qualified Veterinary Practitioners or Nurses they need support and time to improve their competence and confidence. They need to be prepared for the reality that the transition from college life to the working environment is both challenging and exciting but will also be stressful at times. They need to accept the support offered in a meaningful way, to engage fully with any support and mentoring processes that are available and to be aware of the limitations and boundaries of these processes and schemes.

Graduates must have realistic expectations of the working environment of a Veterinary Practice and be prepared to give a fair and reasonable commitment to their first job (12 months suggested). They are expected to have an appreciation of the business realities involved and play their part in the development and promotion of the Practice.

Graduates must be prepared to accept the challenges involved in practising and developing the competencies they have learned in College, must know when to call for experienced help and also when to refer a case to a more experienced or specialised professional.

Graduates must at all times respect the other members, both veterinary and non-veterinary working in the practice.

Graduates should participate in CVE and embrace the concept of lifelong learning from the outset of commencement of work. Participation in CVE and in local veterinary organisations can help with the transition from college to working life as well as improving the knowledge, competence, confidence and motivation of the graduate.