

Vet School vs. The Real World

Veterinary school is no place to study the differences among the 150 AKC-recognized canine breeds.

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Veterinarian Mike Rosek of Stevens Point, Wis., has been a practice owner for more than 20 years and admits to a lot of trial and error before he understood the business and client management aspects of veterinary practice. One of his most important acquisitions, one not taught in veterinary school, was simply learning to listen. I had one class on client relations during our final year of veterinary school but I learned far more during my first few years of interacting with clients, says Rosek. My biggest lesson was to learn to listen to the client. They know their pets well and will tell you what is wrong in many cases. And I had to learn to let them decide what level of care they desired. Early in my practice career, I found myself deciding for them, and that was a mistake.

Many veterinarians own and manage their practice. And, like any business, it must earn income sufficient to cover staff and inventory expenses. Since the doctor will not have corporate contributions to a retirement fund, smart financial planning needs to be done far ahead of any expected time off or retirement. Few veterinary curriculums leave time for economics and finance classes. Money and time management, office personnel interaction, people skills - these are topics seldom studied in veterinary school.

In most states continuing education is required for maintaining a license to practice. The fact that veterinarians are highly cognizant of the requirement and usefulness of continuing education is underscored by the diversity and multitude of courses offered. Some conventions draw thousands of veterinarians and veterinary technicians. According to Robin Bergen, Program Coordinator for Registry of Approved Continuing Education for the American Association of Veterinary State Boards, At present, the American Association of Veterinary State Boards lists only seven state boards in the U.S. that do not require continuing education. The AAVSB approved more than 400 educational programs for 2003; additionally, there are hundreds of local veterinary association programs, online seminars, self-taught courses, and printed educational material.

The issue of euthanasia and how to deal compassionately with patients and their owners was seldom discussed in veterinary school. With the recent understanding of the strength and depth of the human-animal bond, pain control and euthanasia are important issues that every veterinarian confronts daily. Compassion and empathy are only learned through experience.

Keeping up to date on such diverse topics as advances in behavior modification, cancer chemotherapy, canine nutrition, arthritis management, surgical techniques, and computer technology is critical for every veterinarian, and benefits canine patients and, indirectly, their loving owners.

Every day a veterinarian acquires knowledge not taught in veterinary school that affects the quality of medical care he provides to his patients.