

## 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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A week before I opened the doors to my first animal hospital 30 years ago, a woman stopped by to introduce herself and her little white dog. She wanted me to spay the dog, Sophie, as soon as we were ready to see patients. The meeting went well until I said, These little Poodles are certainly a lot of fun, aren't they? Imagine my embarrassment when she curtly replied, Doctor Dunn, Sophie's a Bichon!

Veterinary school is no place to study the differences among the 150 AKC-recognized canine breeds. Throw in subtle grooming trends, variations in size along breed lines, and an array of coat lengths and colors, and an entire semester could be spent learning how not to embarrass yourself in front of your clients.

Recently I was doing some work in a modern, computerized practice in Florida. I had no preparation for what seemed routine for everyone else. The practice manager showed me the paperless computer interface that I was to master before I could begin seeing patients. Briefly instructed to input all the patient history and notes into the patient's digital file, I was warned to remember to save; then to go to the patient's file; then to hit insert into the history before I hit escape so I could search for the next patient's personal file. I was looking for a way to escape and save myself from this mysterious and complex computer-dominated practice. They didn't teach us this in veterinary school.

Thirty years ago in veterinary school small computers were as big as a living room. Since then a tidal wave of important knowledge has arrived and is being put to good use in helping dogs live longer, happier, and healthier lives. Computer resources are becoming much more a part of daily practice. But even recent graduates face unexpected challenges on the job that were not covered in class.

Knowledge of basic software applications allows one to be creative in medicine, management, and client relations, says Charles A. Cohen, DVM, of Branford, Conn., a former president of the Association for Veterinary Informatics. The problem is that even today very few clinicians have had such training. A goal of contemporary veterinary education should be to influence the priority that today's graduates give to clinical computing. The more capable they are in using software and enhanced business processes the more successful they will be in clinical and business management.

There are always new diagnostic challenges in the practice of veterinary medicine. No two patients are the same; no two surgeries will be alike; no Parvo, pyometra or bone fracture patient will respond according to a predetermined protocol. On-the-job training - in other words, continuing education - is something veterinarians do daily.