

Veterinary Leadership – induction for new students

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Modern veterinary curricula recognize that students not only need to develop the knowledge and technical skills required for veterinary practice, but also need purposeful teaching in the ethical, moral and behavioural norms consistent with those of veterinary professionals. The emphasis placed upon the non-technical component of curricula has deepened in parallel with educators' recognition of their importance to students' and graduates' professional behaviour.

Traditionally, entry to the profession was considered to occur at the end of students' studies (i.e. at graduation or first registration). However, this view is at variance with both the expectations of students entering a veterinary programme and the legal status of the veterinary student. Veterinary students generally enter their training with a clear understanding that they have passed through the first hurdle of entry to the profession; an understanding which is reinforced as they realize the legal privileges that differentiate them from the 'general public'. In veterinary curricula where the educational environment affirms students as full (albeit junior) members of the profession, it is possible to capitalise upon these student expectations to initiate their professional enculturation from the start of their studies

Hence, some schools now have a 'leadership or professional induction' to underline the entry of new students into their profession. Such programmes focus upon showcasing personal qualities such as individual personality, leadership, emotional intelligence, teamwork, group dynamics, communication, diversity, professionalism and conflict resolution. Additionally, their purpose may include helping students transition from dependent to experiential learning, understanding the validity of their and others' moral reasoning, and understanding society's expectations of them as members of the veterinary profession.

The benefits that are conferred by such induction/leadership courses have to be built upon in the subsequent curriculum. Independent learning and professionalism are relatively easy to promote amongst the highly-motivated students that enter a veterinary programme, but are equally easily stifled in a teaching environment that is inimical to such qualities. However, where the leadership course and the balance of the programme are well aligned, great benefits for student learning and professional behaviour can be derived in the ensuing years of study.

Keywords: veterinary education in leadership – professionalism training – veterinary ethics – emotional intelligence – team building.