



New OSCE stations ahead

New classifications and OSCE stations coming down the line.

In this issue: election time, new JVP, new look and website, European update, complaints system, mixed practice options, aTP advice, reasonable adjustment, unpaid placements, events and meetings, exam updates.

Election selections, please!

VN and RCVS Council elections closing soon

Time is running out if you want to place your vote! The VN and RCVS Councils elections close a couple of days early this year, thanks to the Royal Wedding, so 5pm on Wednesday 27 April is your deadline. But with text and internet voting available, there is no excuse to miss the boat.

As last year, for each VN or vet who uses his or her vote, the College will contribute 20 pence to charity. This year, the chosen charity is the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF), which supports veterinary surgeons, nurses and their families who may be facing health, financial or similar difficulties (www.vetlife.org.uk).

If you do not wish a contribution to be made on your behalf, please 'opt out': details of how to do this can be found in the election issue of *RCVS News Extra* which, together with ballot papers, was sent to all

those eligible to vote in March. If you have not received your papers, please contact Ian Holloway (i.holloway@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0727).

There will be opportunity to quiz all candidates online at vetnurse.co.uk or vetsurgeon.org, as appropriate.

This year there are four candidates for three seats on VN Council. Normally, all seats are for four-year terms, however, as one of the VN seats has become vacant due to a member retiring mid-term, the veterinary nurse with the third largest number of votes will sit for one year only. There are 10 candidates for the six seats available on RCVS Council.



Painting the European picture

Vectar – another Leonardo project?

Libby Earle, Head of Veterinary Nursing, brings us up to date with the latest European project bid.

Visitors to the VN Department in February would have found us earnestly peering at over 90 pages of application form for a Leonardo da Vinci project bid – and trying to work out what we needed to say!

We had decided it would be a good idea to share our Nursing Progress Log (NPL) development with European schools of veterinary nursing but, by February, were wondering whether this was such a brilliant idea.

“The teaching and recording of work-based clinical skills in Europe is fraught with many of the same issues as it is in the UK.”

However, we finally managed to get the bid finished, having been encouraged along by our European partners and their cheerful information emails. Our application is now being evaluated and we will be biting nails until August for a decision.

If we have bid successfully, we'll be leading a 'Transfer of Innovation' project in October, to introduce clinical coach training and an NPL system to six European partner schools, in Norway, Finland, the Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal and Italy.

The teaching and recording of work-based clinical skills in Europe is fraught with many of the same issues as it is in the UK, with a few additional ones thrown in for good luck. How many centres in Britain, for example, have to travel 1,000km to visit a student on placement – like they do in Finland?

The partner schools plan to develop a European 'Clinical Teaching and Assessment Record', along with a clinical coach training package, that will meet the needs of European VN schools. What's in it for us you may ask? The opportunity to further develop and refine our own NPL as part of the project process, and to involve UK centres in the sharing of ideas and best practice along the way. Now all we need to do is wait patiently for news from Leonardo. Fingers crossed!

Jacqui Molyneux elected JVP

Awards Chairman elected to College Officer team



Mrs Jacqui Molyneux, Chairman of RCVS Awards and Vice-Chairman of VN Council, was elected Junior Vice-President at the March meeting of RCVS Council. She was uncontested and is due to take up office on RCVS Day, on 1 July 2011.

After graduating in 1981 from the University of Bristol, Jacqui started her career in small animal practice in Liverpool. Following her husband's promotion, she then moved to the North East, where she set up her own practice in a small mining town near Consett. This practice, which was rebuilt in 1997, was accredited as a Veterinary Hospital in 2002 and became part of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme four years later.

Jacqui obtained her Certificate in Small Animal Surgery in 2000 and is currently studying for a Masters in Clinical Oncology with the University of Birmingham.

Throughout the last decade, she has become increasingly interested in veterinary politics and was invited to join the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS) Council in 2000 – she is currently the Society's President.

Jacqui was elected to RCVS Council in 2005 and served for four years on the Disciplinary Committee, as well as chairing the Small Animal Surgery Certificate Board.

Vice-Chairman of VN Council since 2007, Jacqui has chaired the RCVS Awards Board since 2009, steering the development and launch of the new Level 3 Diploma.

Commenting on her election, Jacqui said: "As I have become more and more involved with the RCVS and the work of its committees, I am amazed by the amount of work being done behind the scenes by both Council Members and the RCVS staff. It's sad that many of the profession live in fear of the RCVS as they are only aware of its regulatory function.

"During my time on the Officer team, communication with the profession will be a priority, not for the vocal minority, but with the silent majority who have no idea of the breadth of the work that the RCVS undertakes each year," she added.

Vets needed for VN Council

Two places to be filled

Two vacancies have arisen for veterinary surgeons on VN Council.

The positions, which are open to veterinary surgeons not currently serving on RCVS Council, would be particularly well suited to those veterinary surgeons who have an interest in the nursing profession and some experience of working with nurses. However, applicants need not necessarily be politically involved with the profession at this point.

"Veterinary nurses play a vital role in the practice team and, with the opening of the non-statutory Register in 2007, the VN profession is now recognising its responsibilities in terms of maintaining professional standards, skills and competence," says VN Council Chairman Liz Branscombe.

"Now, more than ever, it is important that vets from all sectors of the profession take the time to get involved with the regulation and development of the role of the veterinary nurse," she adds.

Applications are invited from all veterinary surgeons, although those with some experience of working with veterinary nurses would be most relevant.

The four-year posts will require an annual time commitment of approximately six to ten days.

For an application pack, please contact Annette Amato, Deputy Head of Veterinary Nursing, on 020 7202 0713 or a.amato@rcvs.org.uk. The deadline for the receipt by RCVS of completed application packs is 30 April 2011.



ACOVENE visitors hit London

Visitor training day a success



In March, delegates from European schools of veterinary nursing joined the ACOVENE* Board for a day of visitor training at the RCVS. This was the first time, since ACOVENE was established in 2007, that the Board had organised visitor training, and it was encouraging to see delegates from a number of schools volunteering to become involved.

The day was fairly packed with activities, all based on real college situations. Delegates worked in small groups to evaluate documentation, plan visitation agendas and identify potential issues for exploration at a site visit. Communication was a major theme across the day, with issues such as cultural differences in veterinary nurse training, getting to meet the right people and constructing a visitation report generating lively discussion. At the end of the day, ACOVENE recruited a number of potential visitors (important for the college re-accreditation visits due in 2012) and received some excellent feedback. Some of the (exhausted) European delegates stayed in London for the ensuing weekend to do a spot of sightseeing and recover!

**ACOVENE is the European organisation that accredits programmes of veterinary nurse education and training. Seven EU schools are currently accredited. In addition, the RCVS is an affiliate member, meaning that all RCVS-approved centres meet the accreditation standards and can use the ACOVENE logo.*

Mixed practice pathway on track

Autumn delivery expected

Plans are underway to develop a mixed practice (including farm animal) pathway for the new Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing, and it should be ready by autumn.

The move has been catalysed by the prevalence of mixed practice in the Republic of Ireland. The acceptability of an RCVS qualification to the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) is an important consideration; without VCI approval, no student VN may legally work in a practice south of the border.

The new pathway is being developed in conjunction with Greenmount College in Northern Ireland and the VCI, and the mixed practice stream will join the existing two pathways – equine and small animal – which were launched last summer.

Work commenced in January on the project and we hope that the third option will be available from September. Once developed and added to the RCVS portfolio of qualifications, this new pathway will be available across the UK.

“We very much hope that employers with mixed practices, and colleges in areas where livestock farming is prevalent, will consider the new mixed practice pathway as an alternative to the current small animal-focused training,” says Head of Veterinary Nursing, Libby Earle.



Student figures up

Thirty-one new training practices, including eight auxiliary training practices, have been approved this year, bringing to 1,559 the number of practices where veterinary nurse students can train. Over the 12 months prior to February, 1,168 new student VNs enrolled on the new Level 3 Diploma, compared to 1,121 onto the old award over the same period last year. By March, we'd issued log-ins to the Nursing Progress Log to 1,800 students, both new and those with a Level 2 NVQ qualification transitioning to complete their training.

Making the cut

VN students benefit from zoo's new abattoir

Student veterinary nurses from Duchy College have been among the first to make use of a new abattoir facility at Dartmoor Zoological Park in Devon, where they have learned from the zoo's resident slaughterman Andy Goatman, and invited veterinary surgeon Chris Bamford, via practical demonstrations of equine dissection and anatomy.

The zoo opened the in-house butchering facility predominantly to provide the park's big cats with fresh meat. The abattoir is divided by a glass screen that separates the students from the carcasses, giving them an unrestricted view while protecting them for health and safety reasons.

Carol Knight, Animal Care and Veterinary Nursing Curriculum Area Manager for Duchy College, said the students were thrilled to witness dissection on such a big scale, and it had proved particularly useful now that the Level 3 Diploma includes equine anatomy: "Attending the dissection session was a brilliant and fascinating opportunity for these students to see the actual workings of a horse 'in the flesh', and of course our normal laboratories at the college are unable to provide the students with the space for such large practical demonstrations. Andy was able to take the

animals apart, whilst Chris was able to provide them with a veterinarian's point of view," she said.

Student nurse Emma Field said: "I found being able to look at the brain and organs particularly useful, as well as being able to study the hind limb in such detail."

The zoo says that teachers and lecturers from other colleges are also booking to make use of the facilities for their own students: anyone interested should contact Amy Collie on 01752 837645.



Photos courtesy of Alex Smale, Dartmoor Zoological Park

Mind the gap

Ensuring aTPs can fill the training gaps

Since the Level 3 Diploma came on stream in September, we have had an increase in training practices and, for the first time, smaller practices have been able to take VN students. There were 57 new auxiliary training practices (aTPs) on-board at the time of writing. These practices can provide an excellent learning environment for student veterinary nurses. However, they have limitations, often in relation to their clinical facilities and/or case load and, because of this, have special agreements with their approving 'primary' centre.

These aTP agreements set out how students will fill in the gaps in their practical training and experience resulting from the practice's limitations. They are tripartite, ie between the aTP, the primary centre and the veterinary practice (or other environment) that will provide requisite additional training and experience.

Agreements need to set out very clearly the training and experience to be provided, the potential number of students that can be accommodated, the length of

time involved, duration of the agreement and (if applicable) any other business considerations surrounding the arrangements. Centres need to be sure that they gain all three signatures to the agreement (we are seeing some that are not signed!).

Where a student is registered at a college that isn't the aTP's primary centre, that college will need to agree practical training arrangements, ie be satisfied with the aTP agreement (or make other arrangements). Every centre must ensure that their registered students will have access to the requisite practical training, experience and support in clinical veterinary practice.



Cause for complaint?

Disciplinary procedures for RVNs now live

The disciplinary system for registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) is now in place.

From 1 April 2011, the College has been able to accept complaints about RVNs, although, as is the case with veterinary surgeons, the College will only investigate complaints that question an RVN's fitness to practise, for example, professional misconduct or criminal convictions.

Since the non-statutory Register for veterinary nurses was introduced in September 2007, RVNs have been required to follow the *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses* and keep their skills and knowledge up to date by means of continuing professional development.

The disciplinary procedures are modelled upon those in place for veterinary surgeons, with complaints received going through up to four consecutive stages. Each stage acts like a filter, determining whether or not that complaint will be taken further or closed, with allegations of professional misconduct potentially reaching a Veterinary Nurse Disciplinary Committee

(VN DC) hearing. This committee consists of two RVNs and the existing veterinary surgeons' DC, and, like the veterinary surgeons' DC, will sit in public and have its findings published on the RCVS website (www.rcvs.org.uk).

“The disciplinary procedures are modelled upon those in place for veterinary surgeons.”

Findings of serious professional misconduct may result in an RVN being removed or suspended from the Register of Veterinary Nurses. Until there is a change in the law – something for which the RCVS is pressing – there are no powers to also remove an RVN from the List of Veterinary Nurses.

If a complaint is closed before it reaches VN DC, the RCVS may advise the RVN about professional behaviour, and tell the complainant the nature of the advice, but can apply no other sanction.

Employed or volunteer?

Implications of unpaid placements

The introduction of the new Level 3 Diploma full-time programmes mean that student VNs can now gain work experience in different ways. Some students are employed by practices and some undertake unpaid placement, the availability of which has opened doors to more students wanting to train – one of our aims in introducing the new qualification.

However, there are legal considerations in relation to unpaid placement, about which we reminded centres last May. The following clarification has been provided to us by HMRC, and should be noted by both centres and practices hosting, or employing, student VNs:

- Full-time students undertaking a programme of further (or higher) education may undertake unpaid work experience of up to one year. As the minimum RCVS requirement (under the VN Bye-laws) is in excess of this amount, students in the later stages of their programme should have the opportunity for paid work experience. For these purposes, we would assume that one year includes the statutory annual leave entitlement, ie equates to 48 weeks of actual placement.
- Special National Minimum Wage (NMW) requirements apply to apprentices, who must

be in paid employment, not unpaid placement. If they are under 19, or in the first year of an apprenticeship, they may be paid a reduced apprenticeship rate (currently £2.50/hour); thereafter, they must be paid the NMW applicable for their age group. Wherever students are placed on a specific apprenticeship (training) contract for the duration of their training they classify as apprentices, whether or not they are in receipt of apprenticeship funding.

It transpires that some practices expect to retain unpaid placement students for more than one year.

If there is any possibility that a student may need to undertake more than one year in unpaid placements, they must agree to this at the commencement of training via a formal volunteer agreement, not when they have already undertaken a year of unpaid work. Such an agreement must not amount, in effect, to an unpaid contract of employment, and centres and practices are strongly advised to seek advice from HMRC in such cases.

Should you have further queries regarding the employment of students, please contact HMRC for advice (www.hmrc.gov.uk).



Leave the fairies at home...

Plea for professional email addresses

Since we started to offer exams online, students have been providing us with email addresses. Whilst it's good to be individual, there are times when professional and private personas perhaps need to be kept separate. Email addresses used for professional purposes come into this category, and it's getting a bit embarrassing for us, and our IT contractors, to use some of the more imaginative email contacts students send us.

May we suggest that centres either provide students with college email addresses (many already do this) or ask students to create an alternative email address for work use, based on their name? Hunnythebunny, pink.fairy, squeeze_me and littlemissnaughty may make us smile, but perhaps aren't creating the most professional public image for veterinary nursing!



Golden chance to celebrate

New award to recognise contribution to the profession

Do you know someone who has made an outstanding contribution to veterinary nurse training, or any other aspect of the VN profession?

Now's your chance to ensure they get the recognition they deserve, because VN Council has launched a new award to celebrate outstanding achievement, to mark the 50th anniversary of veterinary nursing.

The Golden Jubilee Award will recognise an exceptional contribution to the veterinary nursing profession and/or

a positive contribution to animal welfare.

VN Council strongly felt that the award should be accessible to a wide spectrum of people, so nominees could come from those involved in clinical practice, research, teaching or

politics – in fact, any aspect of veterinary nursing.

Nominations should be received by **1 May 2011**, and more information, together with the nomination form, can be found online at www.rcvs.org.uk/VNat50.



The award will be presented at RCVS Day on 1 July 2011.

Looking back, looking forward

Meanwhile the date has been announced for our golden jubilee seminar – **Thursday, 23 June 2011**.

“The Golden Jubilee Award will recognise an exceptional contribution to the veterinary nursing profession.”

The theme of the day will be looking back/looking forward, with the morning sessions celebrating what the profession has achieved during its first half-century, and the afternoon fielding some controversial speakers to challenge where the veterinary nursing profession goes next.

The event will be invitation-only, although a number of tickets will be available on application. If you would like to join the celebrations, please contact Fiona Harcourt, RCVS Events Officer, on f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk.

Meet the team

Victoria Hedges RVN

What's your role?

Examinations and Higher Education Quality Manager

What's your background?

I started working in veterinary practice at the age of 16. After spending time in private practice and the PDSA, I decided to see a bit of England and took up a position as a sales executive for a petfood company. This was an interesting job and I certainly visited towns and villages which I would not otherwise have seen. I also spent a long time stationary on the M25, so after two years returned to practice. Prior to working at the RCVS, I managed an animal care NVQ course and was appointed as an External Verifier (EV) for City & Guilds. I started working at the RCVS in 2002 as an EV and took up my current position in 2007.

What do you do?

My job is split into two distinct sections. I liaise with universities and HE-linked courses. This involves attending validation events and overseeing the monitoring of the courses. In addition to this, I manage

the theory and OSCE examinations. This includes training examiners, developing the content of the tests and carrying out the quality assurance checks post-examination.

What's been your biggest challenge?

After spending ten years doing jobs which involved driving, I am now primarily desk-based. Working in an office is so different from working in veterinary practice. I enjoy the days that I am able to escape and go on a visit.

Surprise us...

I used to show my Lhasa Apso and was once a finalist in the Junior Dog Handler of the Year competition.



Follow in our footprints...

We step out in style at BSAVA

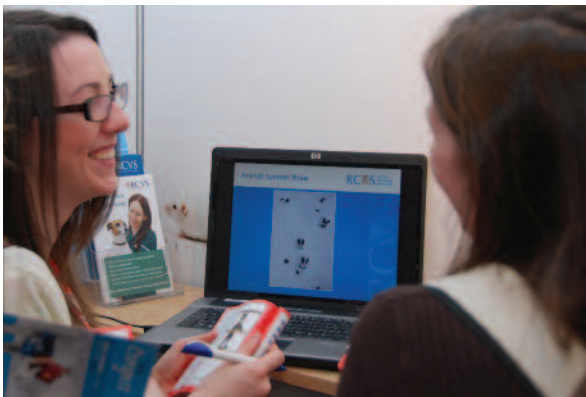
Our 'Step Forward' campaign, to celebrate 50 years of veterinary nursing by encouraging everyone to make the next move in their career, was launched at BSAVA Congress (Birmingham, 31 March to 3 April).

To bring people to the stand to talk about what their next move might be – such as committing to training, joining the Register, taking the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing or even standing for VN Council – we ran a competition which challenged people to identify some animal footprints. Easy! Or so we thought... actually, of the 305 entries, only a third got the answers right, which were: dog, cat and hare.

We expected the hare might catch people out, but even the dog and cat foiled some. The more bizarre wrong answers included:

- For the dog: fox, sea otter, cheetah, badger, sloth, bear, panther, pine marten or racoon
- For the cat: dog, wolf, bear, duck (?), tiger, polar bear or snow leopard
- For the hare: deer (most popular answer), sheep, cow, wild boar, pig, goat, frog, reindeer, alpaca, elk moose or ferret

The winner was Alex Yeu, an RVN at Alfreton Park Veterinary Hospital in Derbyshire, who will receive £100 vouchers for Blacks. Fortunately, she enjoys stepping out: "I will probably spend the vouchers on a new coat for walking my dog," says Alex. "Winning the competition was unexpected and a nice surprise! Thank you very much!"



Count those steps

All those who took part in the competition were given RCVS-branded pedometers and encouraged to email the College to let us know how many steps they take in a typical day in practice. The information will be used in articles in the animal-owner press to help explain the role of the VN in the practice team.

If you missed BSAVA and would like a pedometer, email Lizzie Lockett on l.lockett@rcvs.org.uk. If you picked one up, don't forget to let us know how far you walk! For more information, visit www.rcvs.org.uk/step.



Vetnnet diary date

Oslo venue for September conference

This year's Vetnnet conference will be held in Oslo, on 29–30 September, and will be hosted by the Norwegian School of Veterinary Science. The main theme will be teaching nursing as a science, with the hot topics of rehabilitation and pain management, along with making best use of a nursing skills lab.

Vetnnet is the European association of veterinary nurse educators and its annual

conference offers a variety of workshops, which are interesting for teachers and anyone supporting training students in the workplace.

Also on the agenda is internationalisation, especially the sharing of best education practice across international boundaries and the facilitation of student and teaching staff exchanges. For further information, please visit www.vetnnet.com.

Gathering evidence

The use of evidenced-based practice in OSCEs

One of the biggest challenges of the OSCE examinations is to ensure standardisation – candidates' performance must be marked consistently, regardless of the examiner or venue. However, up to seven examiners can be marking the same OSCE at different sites during the examination period... how do we tackle this?

Examiners are given detailed guidance against each step in the marking criteria, to ensure a standardised approach. This guidance is reviewed periodically to ensure that it remains valid. In addition, examiners attend annual subject-specific standardisation to discuss and agree any areas of the marking criteria that might be open to variable interpretation. Importantly, we ensure as far as possible that the marking criteria and examiner guidance are evidence-based.

Cockcroft and Holmes (2003) define evidence-based practice as "the use of current best evidence in making clinical decisions". The process of searching for evidence starts with a question. For example, when developing OSCE TP04, there were discussions among the examiners regarding acceptable methods for folding surgical drapes in preparation for sterilisation. Some felt that the drape should be folded, others said that they would accept concertina folds and a few said they would accept the drape being rolled. Some were not aware of all methods being

discussed and it became apparent that, without specific guidance, there would be a risk that a student might be marked as achieving the criteria by one examiner and not by another. To resolve matters, the following steps were followed:

1. The question was identified. In this case, it was: "What are the acceptable methods for folding drapes?"
2. A search then took place among sources of evidence (journals, textbooks, internet searches, research reports etc).
3. The evidence found was critically appraised to check for validity and reliability. It was accepted that more than one method might be found and that the marking scheme would need to allow for this. In the event of contradictory information, further research would be necessary to ascertain the most reliable method(s).
4. We trialled methods to ensure that the equipment being made available to OSCE candidates was suitable (we try all of our OSCEs on volunteer students during this stage).
5. The results of the trials were evaluated. Checks were made to ensure that the methods noted in the examiner guidance demonstrated best practice.

Myths and legends

Don't believe everything you hear...

We continue our series looking at some of the exam myths being perpetuated!

Myth: that the OSCE marking criteria for 'demonstrate safe, effective and aseptic technique' is subjective. Each examiner could have a different opinion of what needs to be achieved to pass this step.

Fact: this step usually appears on OSCE stations testing aspects of nursing care. Examiners agree the guidance in relation to each step of the marking criteria. The examiner guidance for this step details the parts of practical performance which must be correctly demonstrated. This usually includes a combination of other steps making up the marking criteria.

As a guide:

- Safe = without harm or injury to the patient, self or others
- Effective = producing the desired effect
- Aseptic = without the introduction of disease-causing micro-organisms

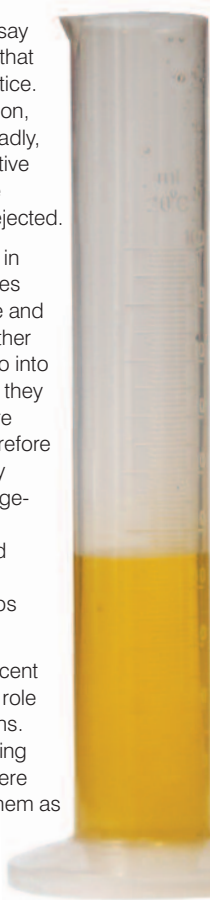
There are sometimes other steps within OSCEs that also relate to a combination of actions. In all cases, the examiners will have agreed specific guidance as to which parts need to be achieved.

Myth: the OSCE marking criteria are published to help students revise for the examination.

Students who question their results often say that they carried out the OSCE in the way that they had been taught in college or in practice. The method used is often based on tradition, myth, hunches or outdated information. Sadly, unless a student can support their alternative approach to an OSCE station with reliable evidence, an examination appeal will be rejected.

Studies carried out among student nurses in the human field concluded that most nurses practised what they had learned in college and rarely used journals, research articles or other literature resources. If these nurses then go into teaching they are also likely to teach what they learned at college and not refer to literature (Pravikoff, Tanner & Pierce, 2005). It is therefore vitally important that those teaching theory or practical skills, whether they are a college-based lecturer or clinical coach, refer to evidence-based practice. Students should also be encouraged to carry out literature searches themselves by following the steps outlined above.

Research in veterinary nursing is a very recent concept. But many aspects of the nursing role mirror those which occur in nursing humans. It is therefore worth checking general nursing literature when searching for the answer. Here are some questions to try – why not use them as the foundation of a bank of references which can be shared with other students and clinical coaches?



- What is the finest hypodermic needle size recommended when administering Clamoxyl Long Acting 150 mg/ml Suspension as a subcutaneous injection to a dog?
- How many published methods of folding surgical drapes can you find? Does it matter how they are folded?
- What is the correct way to replace clipper blades?
- Which size hypodermic needle is suitable for an intramuscular injection for a cat?
- What methods are available to measure urine output accurately?

These are intended to stimulate thought and discussion; please do not call us for the answers!

References

Cockcroft PD, & Holmes M A (2003): *Handbook of Evidence-Based Veterinary Medicine*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.
Pravikoff DS, Tanner AB & Pierce ST (2005): 'Readiness of US nurses for evidence-based practice', *American Journal of Nursing*, 105 (9), pp 40-51.

Further reading

Banks D (2010): 'Evidenced-based practice in veterinary nursing', *The Veterinary Nurse*, 3 (1), pp 136-139.
Everitt S (2008): 'Applying evidenced-based veterinary medicine', *In Practice*, (30), pp 526-528.

Fact: the OSCE stations are published to provide students, teachers and clinical coaches with a tool to enable practical skills to be taught and learned from the beginning of training.

“Effective hand hygiene should be second nature at this stage of training, not something to learn for an exam.”

Using driving as analogy, learner drivers are taught safe practice (as expected in the Driving Test) from day one. Learning to drive one way for over a year and then trying to 'cram' for a test using unfamiliar techniques would be a recipe for disaster, as well as being potentially lethal to other road users. Yet this appears to be common in veterinary nurse training.

As part of the examiners' training course we run mock examination days, which students attend as 'models'

for the trainee examiners. Recently, we tested hand hygiene using the World Health Organisation (WHO) method. It was shocking that very few of the students were able to demonstrate this skill correctly, having worked in clinical practice for at least 18 months. Their excuse: "We have not started revising for the examinations". Effective hand hygiene should be second nature at this stage of training, not something to learn for an exam.

The OSCE stations address several key areas of practice where safety is critical and they provide an evidence-based method on which to base teaching. The various nursing procedure books give guidance on a much wider range of clinical skills. Please, please use them to teach practical skills from the outset. Don't forget that the basics, such as hand hygiene, are relevant to Animal Nursing Assistants and other lay staff, too. Not only will this improve your students' practical work and the safety of their patients, but they will also find the final examinations a doddle.

All change for OSCE stations

Revised OSCEs now published online

Preparations are underway for the first 12-station OSCE, which will be available for students registered on the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing. The existing OSCE stations have been revised and have now been published online (www.rcvs.org.uk). At first sight it may look as though they have undergone major change, but, in reality, the scenarios and marking criteria essentially remain the same. Each OSCE station has been referenced to the relevant award (NVQ or Level 3 Diploma) and reclassified into five new categories:

1. Laboratory Diagnostics (LD)
2. Diagnostic Imaging (DI)
3. Theatre Practice (TP)
4. Supporting Anaesthesia (SA)
5. Nursing Care (NC)

A brief description of the OSCE will appear alongside the code on the website. This will help when searching for specific OSCEs. Small animal and equine OSCEs are no longer categorised separately. There is a chart on each detailing which award(s) the OSCE will test.

Some of the scenarios have been reworded, and the patient's weight will no longer appear on the scenario; instead, this will appear on the patient record card provided at the relevant station.



The published OSCEs contain details of the previous code and the date it was last amended. For the first time, colleges will be provided with the published information in electronic format to place on their intranet. Updated versions will be sent as they become available.

Finally, candidates will be pleased to hear that the oral questions have been removed, although examiners may ask a question to clarify something that the student has demonstrated. For example, in diagnostic imaging, the examiner may ask a candidate to clarify the landmarks used for centring and collimation.

To be eligible to apply to enter the examination, students must have attempted, and preferably passed, all other assessments (internal and external).

Advise us on adjustment

Ensure we are aware of reasonable adjustment

The Awarding Body receives a steady stream of requests for 'reasonable adjustments' in relation to examinations. A reasonable adjustment is any action that helps reduce the effect of a potentially disadvantaging disability. The majority of these applications relate to changes required for the RCVS Theory or OSCE examinations. However, we rarely receive reasonable adjustment requests for assessments carried out within a centre. This either means that centres aren't making adjustments, or that they are not informing the RCVS, as they should.

For all but the most minor of adjustments, permission must be sought from RCVS Awards. Recent applications include:

- An interpreter for someone who has English as a second language

- A dyslexic student who required additional time in the examinations
- A student requesting examination information be provided in a large font

Each of these applications has been made only in relation to the RCVS examination. Do these students not require similar considerations for centre-based assessment, or are centres agreeing reasonable adjustments without the awarding body's permission?

Please remember that all assessments set out in the Qualification Handbook are summative, which means that all reasonable adjustment requests must be approved by us. Failure to comply could result in nullification of the assessment. Further details of the relevant policy, and reasonable adjustment application forms, can be found at www.rcvs.org.uk/vnawards.

New challenges ahead

New OSCE stations in the pipeline

A number of new OSCE stations have been developed over the past 12 months. As reported elsewhere, new OSCEs go through an intensive period of trialling and review prior to being published.

Ear, ear

The first of these being finalised for publication falls into the Laboratory Diagnostic (LD) category. Candidates will be tested collecting an aural sample from a patient. They will then be requested to package the sample for dispatch to an external laboratory. We are using a model dog fitted with a penrose drain, providing a realistic external auditory meatus. The model dog is from the Faithful Friends range and a variety of equipment will be provided to allow students to pack the sample to meet UN packaging instruction P602.

Feed up

Another OSCE will test candidates' ability to feed patients via a naso-oesophageal tube. For this OSCE, we are using a model cat from the FurReal range. Candidates will be expected to choose a suitable diet from a selection of commonly available commercial diets and, using the information provided, will be expected to calculate the quantity of food required. Finally, candidates will need to demonstrate the administration of the chosen diet.

Taking the measure

Another model dog has been installed with an indwelling urinary catheter connected to a urine collection system. Candidates will be required to demonstrate the routine checks they make in relation to care of the patient's catheter. The quantity of urine expected to be produced will be calculated and this amount compared to the quantity actually produced.

The FurReal model cats are also being used for OSCEs that will test students on the administration of fluid therapy and medication via the intravenous route. The model foal from the Hansa range currently used for

administration of medication will be used for the equine version of these OSCEs.

The model used for the new LD OSCE described above is also suitable to administer medication to the ear. This OSCE is currently being written.

In Nursing Care (NC) there are a couple of OSCEs being developed based on preparation of the hospital accommodation.

Theatrical rehearsals

For Theatre Practice (TP) a model is also being developed which will be suitable to demonstrate patient skin preparation prior to a surgical procedure. We are also looking into the feasibility of using disposable surgical gowns instead of the cotton ones currently available.

Once the trials have been completed, the final versions will be published online. It is normal procedure for an OSCE to be published for at least three months prior to being used in the examination.



Watch the birdie...

New logo and website for RCVS Awards

The eagle-eyed amongst you may have noticed a new sleeker dove on the front cover of your *VN Standard*. The perkier bird comes from the new logo for the awarding body.

You will also notice that the name has changed slightly – we are now RCVS Awards – although the awarding body function remains the same.

The new logo was developed as part of a comprehensive overhaul of the look and feel of College communications, although it retains the colour and the dove symbol that have become well recognised since the launch of the new awarding body identity in 2006.

The purpose the College-wide review – which last took place over a decade ago – was to modernise the College's presentation and better reflect its core role as a statutory regulator. The new College logo, which you can see on the back page of this newsletter, also has a new strapline – setting veterinary standards – which we

hope will dispel some of the confusion about the College's function that research revealed to be present among both the public and the profession. We've not lost our coat of arms, though, and it will still take pride of place on more ceremonial items, such as certificates and scrolls.

The new look was launched in mid-March with a new website, which was produced following research amongst our site visitors. A key part of the new site is a dedicated section for RCVS Awards, where all of the information for centres, TPs and students can be found.

We've also added new features, such as a ticker-tape to flag up site-changes, news and deadlines; pictorial banners; quick links from the home-page; and, social media bookmarks. There are new sections for animal owners and the RCVS Charitable Trust, too.

Feedback so far suggests it's easier to find the information visitors want: do take a look and let us know what you think.



Separate sections for students, employers and centres

Improved search functions for the whole site, and dedicated search tools for *Guides to Professional Conduct*, publications, documents and the news archive

Photographic banners to highlight responsibilities and ongoing activities

Ticker-tape feed for quick updates

'Quick links' to popular areas



Latest news and views from the College

Social media links and RSS feed

New Trust boost for VNs

RCVS Charitable Trust supports the profession

The RCVS Charitable Trust is giving a boost to the VN profession in its Golden Jubilee year, as its Director, Cherry Bushell, explains.

To celebrate this landmark year, and in close consultation with leading veterinary nurses, the RCVS Charitable Trust has developed a dedicated programme of new grants and activities. The programme aims to encourage veterinary nurses to push the boundaries of their roles, and to make a unique difference to animal care.

Our ambition is to become a better resource and advocate for veterinary nurses, and to deliver better animal health and welfare through the unique strengths of the profession.

"We want to inspire and encourage veterinary nurses to use their unique vantage point to change and improve practice."

The objectives of the programme are to:

- **Support** veterinary nurse practical education with equipment grants
- **Inspire** veterinary nurses to lead changes and innovation in practice
- **Empower** veterinary nurses to disseminate their knowledge and experience

Equipment grants for VN training centres

In 2010, the Trust opened up the equipment grants which are available to veterinary schools to accredited VN training centres for the first time. In 2011, the awards will be exclusively awarded to VN training centres, equating to £20,000 in total. Up to five organisational awards will be available for training centres to bid for from April. Go to the website for details (www.rcvstrust.org.uk), or get yourself added to the grants alert list by emailing grants@rcvstrust.org.uk.

Nurse clinics – principles and practice

In partnership with the BVNA, we are creating a training product for nurses in practice who would like to run their own health clinics, but need the confidence and start-up skills to get going. We hope to provide training, advice and ongoing support.

Driving practice innovation

Last year, a final-year student at Harper Adams got into the news with her dissertation on the effects of music

on feline patients in the veterinary environment. It wasn't the first attempt to study the effects of music on veterinary patients, but it was a good example of where apparently minor changes can make big differences to practice.

We believe that practice innovation can come as much from these practical, small-scale changes as from those driven by clinical improvements and management needs. We want to inspire and encourage veterinary nurses to use their unique vantage point to change and improve practice. We will be consulting with centres, regional groups and practices with a view to sparking ideas and developing the best projects that emerge. Email grants@rcvstrust.org.uk to be added to the alert list.

Changing behaviour

Veterinary nurses are ideally placed to use their expertise to engage young people in caring for their pets at home, and encouraging them to greater understanding and empathy for all animal needs. We will run a pilot to work with a school or other group to explore a project that has the potential to roll out to other schools and organisations. An initial fund of £5,000 has been set aside for this programme.

For more information about all of these initiatives, visit www.rcvstrust.org.uk.



A canine mannequin was purchased by Harper Adams in 2010, thanks to the Spencer Hill Equipment Award

Early bird catches the news

Sign up to Twitter for the first byte

This issue of VN Standard brings you up to date on all things RCVS Awards-related. But if you are one of the more than 550 people who follow us on Twitter, some of it will be old news to you!

We launched our Twitter account (@RCVS_UK) in September last year, and since then have been tweeting two or three times a week with news and updates on College and RCVS Awards activities. It's where you will hear the news first, so why not follow us today? We look forward to hearing from you.

The Trust has also recently joined the twittersphere, so while you're in the tweeting mood, follow them too, on @RCVSTrust.



Theory examinations (e-assessment)		Practical examinations	
Spring 2011		Summer 2011	
Results published	21 April	Closing date for entries	13 May
Summer 2011		Exam weekend	17 – 19 June
Closing date for entries	6 May	Results published	21 July
Appointment booking window	6 June – 1 July	Autumn 2011	
Exam week	4 – 16 July	Closing date for entries	12 August
Results published	25 August	Exam weekend	16 – 18 September
Winter 2011		Results published	20 October
Closing date for entries	16 September	Winter 2011	
Appointment booking window	17 October – 11 November	Closing date for entries	4 November
Exam weeks	14 – 25 November	Exam weekend	9 – 11 December
Results published	10 January	Results published	TBC
Spring 2012		Spring 2012	
Closing date for entries	20 January	Closing date for entries	2 March
Appointment booking window	13 February – 9 March	Exam weekend	30 March – 1 April
Exam weeks	12 – 25 March	Results published	TBC
Results published	TBC		

Who does what...

Libby Earle: *Head of Veterinary Nursing*
 Annette Amato: *Deputy Head of Department, Awarding Body Board Secretary, Secretary to VN Council*
 Julie Dugmore: *Quality assurance and EV liaison*
 Vicky Hedges: *Examinations and higher education quality assurance*
 Christine James: *Centre approvals and monitoring*

Amy Woods: *Student enrolments, careers advice*
 Jenny Orme: *Award certificates, registration for newly-qualified nurses*
 Ben Myring: *Examinations*

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Printed by an ISO 14001 certified printer using 100% vegetable-based inks on a totally chlorine-free FSC certified stock www.sterlingsolutions.co.uk

