



Sticking with it: TPs hold on to VNs

“Well over half of student respondents intend to remain in their training practices; 68% of recent qualifiers had indeed stayed put.”

In this issue: waste disposal, survey, VETNNET conference, Records of Training, practicals feedback, validation advice, e-assessment update, examiner and assessor training, exam dates.

A rubbish article

Are you up-to-date with waste disposal legislation?

Candidate responses to exam questions about the disposal of clinical waste have highlighted a worrying lack of awareness about the Department of Health's 2006 guidance¹.

The new guidance introduced some key changes, it:

- Removed the old clinical waste group definitions A – E
- Introduced and defined new identification terms (healthcare waste, infectious waste, medicinal waste and offensive/hygiene waste)
- Introduced a new colour-code system for the disposal of waste

The safe disposal of healthcare waste begins at practice level with correct identification of the different categories, separation and disposal. The first step is that of identifying hazardous and non-hazardous waste. In the case of clinical waste, the two hazardous groups are infectious waste (anything that poses a known or potential risk of infection) and medicinal waste involving cytotoxic or cytostatic products (including empty bottles/vials, syringe bodies, tubing etc). These need to be carefully identified and placed in the correct containers for disposal.

A new category has been identified for offensive/hygiene waste. This includes urine and faeces and anything contaminated with these. These are no longer required to be incinerated, but

must be separately identified from ordinary domestic waste.

Sharps containers follow the new coding system in the colour of their lids – see below.

Practices should, by now, have used up old supplies of disposal bags and containers and should be using the new system, so it is surprising that we received several telephone calls following the recent examinations to tell us the questions in this area had the wrong answer options. They don't: the enquiring practices/colleges are out of date!

- The BVA has produced advice and a poster designed to help practices comply with the waste disposal legislation. The poster can be downloaded at www.bva.co.uk/policy/hw_guide.asp



Yellow stream

Infectious waste that requires disposal by incineration

Eg. anatomical waste, chemical reagents, diagnostic specimens

Orange stream

Infectious waste which may be treated to render it safe or, alternatively, incinerated

Eg. "soft" infectious waste, such as used dressings, bandages and casts

Purple stream

Cytotoxic and cytostatic waste

Eg. cytotoxic drugs and associated contaminated materials, such as syringes, empty packaging, gloves

Yellow/black stream

Offensive or hygiene waste

Eg. faeces, urine, contaminated bedding

Black stream

Domestic waste that does not contain infectious materials, sharps or medicinal products and which cannot be recycled

Eg. packaging materials, food waste

¹Health Technical Memorandum 07-01: *Safe Management of Healthcare Waste*, Department of Health 2006

Appraisals pay off

Survey results confirm positive benefits of appraisals

They may not be everyone's favourite activity, but appraisals are definitely worthwhile, according to our *Survey of the Veterinary Nursing Profession 2008*.

The survey was sent to all listed/registered and recently de-listed veterinary nurses, and enrolled students. It achieved a 35% response rate and responders included 790 students. The results indicate a positive correlation between the 72% of students and recent qualifiers who had received an appraisal and the degree of satisfaction they felt about their training.

Compared with those who had not been appraised, appraisees rated more highly their support from employers, others in the practice and VNACs, and had a better perception of the quality of their training practice or college/university experience. This either means that appraisals help to develop a stronger relationship with the students, who therefore view the whole training experience more positively, and/or that those organisations that take the trouble to appraise their students are also more likely to provide a better quality of experience.

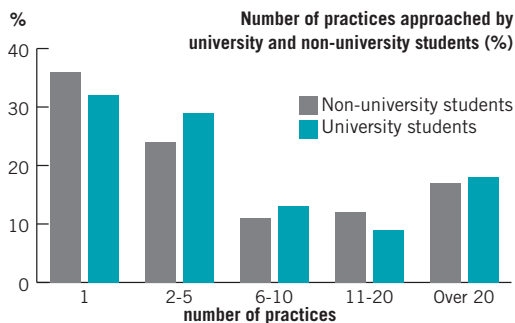
The rosy glow even extended to satisfaction over salaries, with 28% of those who received an appraisal saying they were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with their pay, compared with just 20% of those who had not received an appraisal.

Students were asked what they intended to do when they qualified, and 57% planned to remain

in their training practices (TPs). Meanwhile, 68% of recent qualifiers had in fact remained in their TP. Both statistics should reassure TPs, or those considering becoming TPs, that they will benefit from their training investment.

A less positive statistic, however, related to the number of practices students had to approach when seeking a placement or TP. Forty percent of both university and non-university students had to approach six or more practices before they found a placement. "It is particularly worrying in the case of university students: the university should take responsibility for providing practice placements for its students," says Libby Earle, Head of the Veterinary Nursing Department.

The full report will be available online shortly at www.rcvs.org.uk/surveys. Look out for an *RCVS News Extra* that summarises key findings.



Continental drift

European conference hits the UK

Calling everyone involved in veterinary nurse education. This year, the annual VETNET conference is coming to the UK, co-hosted by Warwickshire College and the RCVS at Stratford-upon-Avon. As usual, the conference will provide a great CPD and networking opportunity for veterinary nursing tutors and lecturers.

VETNET is the European association for veterinary nurse educators and membership is open to colleges and universities offering VN programmes. This year the conference theme is *Developing the Reflective Veterinary Nurse*. The programme

includes keynote speakers from the UK and the USA, as well as a series of workshops offering the opportunity to share ideas and best practice with colleagues from Dublin to Dubrovnik.

Come and join us from Thursday 25 to Saturday 27 September; conference fee €250 for non-VETNET members (approximately £200). For further details, or to book your place, contact Alida Moene (VETNET Coordinator) a.moene@groenhorstcollege.nl.



It all adds up

Incomplete experience records can delay registration

In addition to gaining their NVQ and VRQ, or qualifying degree, student VNs must also fulfil the RCVS regulatory requirement to complete their practical experience. For day-release students, this is 94 full-time weeks, and for full-time students, 70 weeks (or the part-time equivalent period). A record of this experience is checked by us as part of the registration process for newly-qualified nurses.

Unfortunately, it seems that students (and their practice supervisors) are not very good at keeping these records up-to-date. For example, in April, we had to delay 43 registration applications because of insufficient or incomplete records of practical training and, in general, about 40% of applications are in some way inadequately completed. However, a little more attention to training records would have avoided the delay. The most common problems we encounter are:

- Records of training partially or inaccurately completed. One applicant managed to accumulate 148 weeks of training across two years...

- Lost records
- Records not signed and dated by the designated TP principal
- Counting of unauthorised hours, for example, locum work undertaken outside of a university programme
- No record of absences, or records of absence not matching with training record dates

“About 40% of applications are in some way inadequately completed.”

So, what to do? First of all, include the Record of Training in your initial briefing/orientation for new student nurses and check it periodically alongside their portfolios. If students realise it's important from the start they may be less likely to overlook it. If a registration application does get returned to one of your nurses, read the accompanying letter carefully and check with the VN Department (Jenny Orme j.orme@rcvs.org.uk) if in any doubt about what steps need to be taken.

More practice required

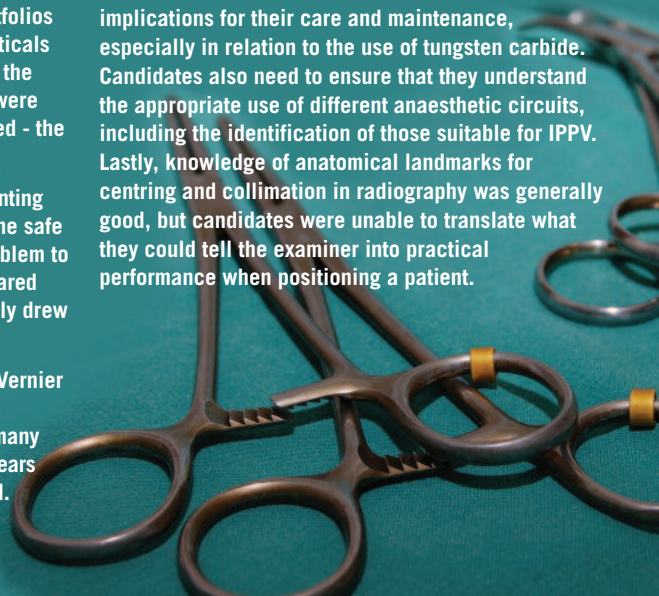
Feedback from the practicals

Our first weekend practical exams, held in March, were very quiet. This was largely due to incomplete portfolios, which is worrying, as all candidates should have completed Level 3 portfolios by the time of taking a re-sit. The summer practicals have also been quieter than usual, possibly for the same reason. However, the March candidates were obviously well prepared, as 76% of them passed - the highest ever pass-rate!

Some areas of the practical exam are still presenting problems to candidates. On the medical side, the safe and effective handling of a syringe posed a problem to some and a high proportion of candidates appeared unfamiliar with insulin syringes and consequently drew up an incorrect dosage.

In laboratory tasks, candidates' ability to read Vernier scales was better, and good technique was demonstrated for producing blood smears. Yet many were unable to comment on the quality of the smears or identify why poor smears had been produced.

In the surgical area, instrument recognition was very good but candidates displayed poor knowledge of the material(s) used to construct instruments and the implications for their care and maintenance, especially in relation to the use of tungsten carbide. Candidates also need to ensure that they understand the appropriate use of different anaesthetic circuits, including the identification of those suitable for IPPV. Lastly, knowledge of anatomical landmarks for centring and collimation in radiography was generally good, but candidates were unable to translate what they could tell the examiner into practical performance when positioning a patient.



Meet the Awarding Body team



Alison Rengert
RVN D32/33/V1

What's your role?
External Verifier

What's your background?
I started working in the animal care business in 1990, after being made redundant as a display and interior designer. I started as a seasonal zoo keeper during the summer of 1990, and then became employed as an ambulance driver and hospital assistant for an animal charity for five years. Facing redundancy again, I decided to train as a veterinary nurse, qualifying from Moulton College in 1999.

In 2000, I joined the surgical nursing team at the Royal Veterinary College's Queen Mother Hospital, gaining my D32/33. From 2003-2004, I worked as

lecturer and achieved the V1 qualification, before returning to nursing as a locum from 2004-2007.

I joined the RCVS in November 2007 as an external verifier.

What do you do?

I verify the performance of approved centres in order to ensure the quality and consistency of NVQ training and assessment against national requirements; I also provide support to the centres in order to assist them in improving the effectiveness and quality of veterinary nurse training.

What's been your biggest challenge?

Deciding to train as a veterinary nurse and go back to college as a mature student... and succeeding!

Surprise us....

I worked at Harrods for eight years designing and dressing their windows!

Testing times

Lessons learned from the first e-assessments

The nail-biting is almost over. As we go to press, the 1,400 or so candidates who have applied for the first e-test exams have booked their appointments and are sitting their exams at all points from Orkney to Oakhampton.

So how's it gone? Surprisingly well, we think. Most of the "bugs" were caught during March when a number of centre staff were reminded of their student days and sat the pilot papers, along with our External Verifier (EV) team. We are pleased (and relieved) to say they all passed and that the lowest mark was 74% - nobody scraped through!

Almost all of the summer candidates booked appointments early in the "window", which is excellent and means that they have had a very good choice of available appointments and test centres. However, novelty may have played a part and it will always remain important for candidates to book as early as they can to get this level of choice.

Despite the success of the pilot, we have had a few minor problems with the online booking system.

The main issue has been rejected candidate emails. We had around 140 of these and the faulty data originated with the application spreadsheets sent by centres. We think this was as a result of transcription and typing errors and suggest the following fix for the next exam round:

- Get your candidates to email you with the address they wish to use for exam correspondence.
- Cut and paste their addresses into a) the Excel spreadsheet for RCVS and b) a cohort email group so that you can contact your candidates with further information, reminders etc and check that the addresses work.

Another minor problem arose with authorisation for candidates to sit papers on separate days. More candidates than we anticipated elected to do this and in future we shall be asking candidates to identify their preferences at the application stage. Sitting separate papers is a slightly more expensive option and so we shall need to adjust our fee structure accordingly for 2009.

Valid advice



Guidance for those planning a validation event

The summer is always a busy time for degree validations and this year has been no exception. We have participated in five events, accrediting foundation and honours degrees in veterinary nursing.

All of these programmes have been designed to lead directly to registration as a veterinary nurse. That is, the curriculum, assessments and clinical placement fully address the *RCVS Professional Syllabus* and *National Occupational Standards*. This means that it is the degree awarded, and not RCVS NVQ and VRQ awards, that gains graduates entry to the *VN Register*. However, the first cohort of students on new degree programmes must sit the RCVS external exams until the College is satisfied that there is parity between the university's standard of assessment and that of the RCVS.

One of the good things about undergraduate programmes is that the additional time spent in academic study enables universities to explore the RCVS syllabus in more depth and to include a variety

of "added value" subjects such as practice management, farm animal health or animal behaviour. Universities usually work closely with their affiliated training practices to design a curriculum that meets their needs, both in terms of the academic programme and, of course, the organisation of clinical placements. This summer's clutch of awards is no exception and offers potential students a tempting variety of different approaches to veterinary nursing.

As ever, we have some feedback on the validation events that we attended this summer. Here they are, for the benefit of colleges and universities planning future events:

- Let us know what you are planning and submit documentation on time. Our team diary fills up very quickly and we are very unlikely to be able to attend a validation event at short notice. As soon as you know you are developing (or reviewing) an award, complete an Application in Principle form and let us know.

Examiners brush up

Standardisation course and call for new examiners

The credibility of our exams rests heavily on the expertise and approach of our examiners, so we hold regular and mandatory training for everyone who examines veterinary nursing candidates. During April and May, 64 of our established examiners attended standardisation training at Sparsholt College, Bridgwater College or Nottingham Trent University.

In the morning, there was an introduction to the new examination format and a general discussion about the role of the examination team. This was

followed by the examiners setting up and practising the OSCE task stations. Every task currently on the question bank was set up, discussed and a standard approach agreed. This means that all the practical examination centres are able to adopt a similar approach to assessing each exam task. The debate that takes place at examiner training events is invaluable and enables us to develop and refine both new and established tasks as well as to streamline the running of exam centres.

Could you be an RCVS examiner?

We are always pleased to add new examiners to our team. If you are an experienced A1 assessor (normally with at least four years of post-qualification experience as a VN or vet), you could join our new examiner training programme.

Training takes place over a series of three days, which include objective assessment skills, standard-setting, writing OSCE tasks and a day of practical examining using "real" revision candidates. The next induction day is on 3 November 2008.

For further details, contact Julie Dugmore j.dugmore@rcvs.org.uk



- Ensure your accrediting university understands the RCVS's role as professional regulator and our processes for accrediting programmes. Provide us with a contact name in your university's academic standards department so that we can liaise directly and ensure your validation panel has relevant RCVS, as well as university, information.

“CPD must be actively planned and implemented.”

- Make sure you have access to sufficient clinical placements, normally at your own affiliated training practices, for all students registered for the degree. Veterinary nursing degrees are integrated programmes of academic and practical learning. Expecting your students to find their own placements is tantamount to selling them an incomplete programme and is unacceptable, yet our recent survey suggested that 40% of university students had to approach six or more practices before securing a placement (see graph on page 3).
- You will need to teach clinical skills within the academic programme to ensure that your students are well-prepared for placements. This means you will need a well-equipped and dedicated practical

suite in which you can teach and supervise a group of students learning and practising clinical techniques. Ideally, students should have access to this resource for self-study as well as during timetabled practical lessons.

- Lecturers on higher education programmes, and especially module leaders, should have qualifications of a higher level than the students taught. This means that veterinary nurses teaching on degree programmes should be graduates, or be actively working towards a graduate qualification. College or university staff CPD plans (asked for by RCVS in support of accreditation applications) must demonstrate how veterinary nurse tutors' CPD will address this requirement over a reasonable time frame. It isn't enough for staff simply to have opportunity for CPD, it must be actively planned (with teaching the VN degree programme in mind) and implemented.

Our apologies for the long list. You will be relieved to know that no college or university had all of these problems, however all had at least one of them, and some had several. Our priority is to accredit viable, high quality programmes that both add to the practising VN pool and to the strength of veterinary nursing as a professional and academic discipline.

Shrinking portfolios?

Reduce your paperwork with the assessor CPD programme

No, this isn't *Alice in Wonderland*. But we really can help you to shrink the paperwork for you and your NVQ candidates and make assessment more efficient, and maybe even more fun into the bargain!

The first of our new assessor CPD programmes ran in July and the feedback so far has been very positive. The course is designed to develop your A1 assessor skills so that you can:

- Develop your mentoring and coaching skills
- Help candidates to learn effectively in practice



- Guide your candidates to demonstrate their competence effectively
- Use a range of different assessment methods appropriately
- Help you/your candidates to make efficient and concise portfolio records

Interested? The next courses are due to run at Bridgwater College on 8-9 October and Myerscough College on 13-14 October. For further details, contact Julie Dugmore: j.dugmore@rcvs.org.uk or 020 7202 0788.

BVNA Congress – see you there?

Bring us your questions

There have been a lot of changes this year in terms of new exam formats and new requirements for centres. If you have any queries, bring them to BVNA Congress on 11 October, when representatives of the RCVS Awarding Body will be pleased to discuss any issues you may have. We look forward to seeing you there!



Fees due

Centre reports and fees: a reminder

Centre (course provider and VNAC) annual reports and fees are due on 1 August. If you have already submitted yours, thank you. If not, this is a gentle reminder to get cracking and send them in. We shall be issuing new centre approval certificates showing the awards your centre is approved to deliver in August and, from now on, these will be re-issued every year once we have received your annual report and fee.

If you have any queries about completing your monitoring report, please contact either your External Verifier or Alex Gould, Centre Approvals Officer, on a.gould@rcvs.org.uk.

Written examinations (e-assessment)		Practical examinations	
Spring 2009		Spring 2009	
Closing date for entries	23 January	Closing date for entries	6 February
Appointment booking window*	23 February – 20 March	Examination	13-15 March
Examination window	W/c 23 March	Results published	W/c 13 April
Results published	W/c 20 April	Summer 2009	
Summer 2009		Closing date for entries	15 May
Closing date for entries	8 May	Examination	19 - 21 June
Appointment booking window*	8 June – 3 July	Results published	W/c 27 July
Examination window	W/c 6 and 13 July	Autumn 2009	
Results published	W/c 24 August	Closing date for entries	14 August
Winter 2009		Examination	18 - 20 September
Closing date for entries	11 September	Results published	W/c 19 October
Appointment booking window*	19 October – 13 November	Winter 2009	
Examination window	W/c 16 November	Closing date for entries	6 November
Results published	W/c 4 January 2010	Examination	11 - 13 December
*dates subject to confirmation		Results published	W/c 18 January

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