

VETERINARY SURGEONS BOARD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Guidelines for the employment of new graduates or inexperienced registered veterinary surgeons

1. Preamble

- 1.1 New graduates are the future of the veterinary profession. However, new graduates need to be supported in the early years of their professional career. They may not have sufficient surgical, medical or even communication skills to provide the level of service required today by clients.
- 1.2 Employing a new graduate or an inexperienced veterinary surgeon carries responsibilities for the practice. (An inexperienced veterinarian may be a veterinarian who has been exclusively employed in a small animal practice becoming employed in an equine practice.) Not all practices will have the resources to properly support a new graduate or inexperienced veterinarian.
- 1.3 Veterinary Boards in Australasia are aware of the need to ensure that new graduates and inexperienced practitioners are supported by their employer during their first year. The Australasian Veterinary Boards Council passed the following resolution in May 2006:

Supervision of New Graduates

That new graduates should work under supervision for a period after graduation has been recognised as an issue and Boards were encouraged by the meeting to take a stronger stance on support of new graduates. This may involve structured internship programs and supervision of institutions. It was acknowledged that the next phase of Dr Craven's review will address these issues examining a structured internship program and/or other methods for integration to practice.

- 1.4 The Veterinary Surgeons Board of South Australia endorsed this resolution, and these Guidelines are considered to be the requirements for practices employing new graduates or inexperienced veterinarians in South Australia.
- 1.5 Employers should not employ an inexperienced veterinarian, or new graduates, unless they are capable of, and willing to provide the required level of support. Employers of new graduates are encouraged to participate in the AVA New Graduate Friendly Practice Scheme.

2. Employers

- 2.1 Employers of new graduates and inexperienced veterinarians should ensure that as a minimum, they provide
 - structured supervision
 - opportunities for skill enhancement and feedback
 - reasonable rostered hours of practice
 - encourage integration with members of the practice and the profession

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New graduates or inexperienced veterinarians should not be left unsupported by their employer.

2.2 *Supervision*

Employers have an obligation to supervise the new graduate or inexperienced veterinarian until they have demonstrated a level of skill equivalent to that expected of a reasonably skilled and experienced veterinarian. The employer, or a senior veterinary practitioner with at least 5 years experience, should be available for direct assistance (on the premises), or by call-back. If this is not possible, a second level of support should be organized. This could be by means of access to alternative back-up, such as a senior veterinary surgeon at a neighbouring practice.

On-premises supervision should be a minimum for new graduates for at least 2 months, except for practices in rural/remote areas. In this circumstance, direct access to an experienced veterinarian by telephone should be arranged.

The degree of supervision over the new graduate's first year will vary with the graduate, and practices should aim to build the new graduate's confidence to enable them to increasingly make their own decisions and perform procedures.

2.3 *Skill enhancement and feedback*

The employer should ensure the new graduate has access to skill enhancement sessions with a senior veterinary practitioner at regular intervals. This could be through

- ◆ discussion of case studies with other veterinarians in the practice
- ◆ regular reviews with others in the practice of a selected number of cases handled by the new graduate – the review and feedback process should be conducted in a supportive environment
- ◆ access to learning resources for current cases for the new graduate

Skill enhancement includes general communication skills as well as medical and surgical skills.

2.4 *Reasonable Practice hours*

The employer should consider the APESMA award as a guide to 'reasonable' working hours.

The new graduate should not be required to attend after hours calls *without adequate support* for their first 6-12 months of practice. For the first 3-6 months, the new graduate should have another veterinarian available on call by telephone for immediate advice, and who, if necessary, can attend and assist with surgery.

The new graduate should not disproportionately bear the burden of after hours duty.

In rural practices, work may be seasonal and this may require additional commitment from all members of the practice in peak periods.

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2.5 *Integration with all staff and the profession*

A formal induction of new employees into the practice is highly recommended. Regular staff or practice meetings involving all members of the practice are important. The new graduate should be included and encouraged to impart their recently acquired knowledge to discussions on recent cases and practice policies.

In rural areas, the employer or senior veterinarian should introduce the new graduate to clients when visiting farms where practicable.

New graduates should be encouraged to attend professional meetings, including seminars, conferences etc. (New Graduates are not required to complete a Continuing Professional Development Return in their first year of practice, but the Veterinary Surgeons Board encourages their involvement in professional meetings.)

3. **Employees**

3.1 New graduates and inexperienced veterinarians should seek assistance from within the practice whenever they find themselves at the limit of their own experience or knowledge.

3.2 New graduates have a responsibility to continue their professional education in all aspects of veterinary practice, including communications.

3.3 New graduates should be aware of and abide by the Code of Professional Conduct, relevant SA legislation (e.g. Veterinary Practice Act 2003, Controlled Substances Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, Livestock Act), and the Guidelines of the Veterinary Surgeons Board of SA in the VSBSA Handbook.

4. **Conclusion**

4.1 Employers should recognize that they have an obligation to provide support, guidance and assistance to new graduates, and to inexperienced veterinarians. This will inevitably result in a higher standard of veterinary service, improved client relations, and the enhanced standing of the profession.

4.2 New graduates should recognize they have a responsibility to their supervisor, mentor and the employing practice, and acknowledge the support provided to them during their first year of practice.

4.3 Employers should not employ an inexperienced veterinarian, or new graduate, unless they have the capacity and are willing to provide the level of support detailed above.

Approved by the Veterinary Surgeons Board of SA: August 2007

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