

vbj training insight

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RCVS certificates: what you should know to be an advanced practitioner

WHEN THE CERTIFICATE in Advanced Veterinary Practice (CertAVP) replaced the “old” RCVS certificates in 2007, it became compulsory for vets to include some professional skills in their learning if they wished to obtain an RCVS certificate. Elizabeth Armitage-Chan (pictured), senior lecturer in veterinary education at the RVC, explains the best way to go about it.

Since 2017, candidates who wish to achieve advanced practitioner status must have completed an assessed module

(or assessed equivalent) in professional key skills prior to application. During this 10-year period, our understanding of professional skills education has evolved. We increasingly recognise, aided by research from the RVC, those who truly engage with professional studies content – and can apply it in a way that integrates with their clinical reasoning and decision-making – and experience higher levels of client satisfaction, enhanced colleague relationships and improved career satisfaction^{1,2}.

So, is professionalism CPD all about telling vets how to

communicate and show exemplary professional behaviour? Yes and no. Communication is important, as evidenced by repeated messages that communication issues represent the majority of client complaints and RCVS

disciplinary procedures. But contemporary professionalism education, as modelled by the RVC, is more centred on individuals, their specific needs relevant to their position in a practice and practice type, and the areas in which they find themselves most frequently challenged.

Personalised topics

Our approach at the RVC to the CertAVP Foundations of Advanced Veterinary Practice module is to provide candidates with a large variety of essay titles, from which they can select topics of interest and personalise them.

A candidate can choose to explore areas such as reasons for client dissatisfaction, challenges in the veterinary team, difficult team appraisals, ethical dilemmas relating to animal welfare, or the multiple perspectives of the costs of veterinary care.

The aim is not simply that those who achieve this qualification have a baseline knowledge of ethical reasoning, teamwork, communication, veterinary business and public health. By guiding candidates towards suitable resources, and

providing detailed feedback on their work, we consider it more important they can apply this knowledge to their own challenges, adapt information sourced from literature searches to solve the individual problems they encounter, and improve their management of future challenging scenarios.

Professionalism education is no longer about discrete courses in business studies, communication skills and veterinary ethics, although these remain important in providing a platform from which vets can develop their skills. Courses are available through the RVC’s CPD unit in linking professional problem solving to career resilience, reflective practice and its application to clinical and professional development, and supporting learning in the workplace.

The format used by RVC CPD, in which didactically delivered webinars are integrated with online discussion, provided over a sustained period of study (typically four to six weeks), has been associated with the highest levels of CPD outcome – changes in delegates’ practice and an improvement in the service they provide^{3,4}.

The webinars provide an introduction to a topic, such as teamwork, professional identity, communication skills or ethics. Delegates are then given the opportunity to discuss relevant experiences from their work. As part of the discussion, the tutor provides advice on how to use the course material to overcome the challenges and difficulties delegates have described.

Material once viewed as a function of upbringing, experience or “common sense” – such as empathy, moral decision-making or collaborative working – is presented through a lens of



the challenges experienced in consistently adhering to the high standards vets set themselves.

Real-life issues

Rather than “teaching” these subjects in an abstract, decontextualised way, the focus is on how they manifest in the clinic, alongside real-life issues of heavy workload, demanding clients, varying priorities in the practice team and the stresses of complicated patients and financial limitations. Most of all, the focus is predominantly on the complexity and richness of general practice, and learning to value the very important service provided by this section of the profession.

Why do we believe this is important to postgraduate and continuing education? No vet can consider himself or herself disconnected from the mental health concerns of

our profession. Even for those who are not personally affected by career dissatisfaction, frustration at the contextual complications of clinical practice or poor mental health, an improved understanding of these issues will strengthen vets’ ability to understand and provide support for their peers.

The RVC’s approach to postgraduate and continuing education is an extension of its undergraduate teaching strategy, which is increasingly dedicated to shaping students’ professional identities⁵. This means providing students with a view of what it means to be a vet, which will enable them to practise in a real-world setting of varying client needs and responsibility to the veterinary business.

Those who embrace this identity can achieve a sense of satisfaction, not only from successfully treating a patient’s

disease, but also helping a client through a difficult decision or negotiating an adapted clinical plan to work with financial limitations.

Those who exclusively prioritise clinical diagnosis and treatment face a much tougher challenge to consistently meet their career goals, and encounter more career dissatisfaction and frustration².

The broader, more holistic version of the veterinary identity cannot be achieved without engaging in material to improve expertise in teamwork, business practice, ethical decision-making and client relationships. While most experienced vets achieve competence in these areas in most situations, it is when faced with challenges of client conflict, opposing values in the team, significant financial constraints or unusual case scenarios, these skills become

challenged. At postgraduate and continuing education level, it is this contextualised application of these areas on which the RVC focuses its courses.

References

1. May SA and Kinnison T (2015). Continuing professional development: learning that leads to change in individual and collective clinical practice, *Vet Rec* **177**(1): 13.
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3. Forsetlund L, Bjørndal A, Rashidian A et al (2009). Continuing education meetings and workshops: effects on professional practice and health care outcomes (review), *Cochrane Libr* **2**(2): 2-4.
4. Davis D, O’Brien MAT, Freemantle N et al (1999). Impact of formal continuing medical education: do conferences, workshops, rounds, and other traditional continuing education activities change physician behavior or health care outcomes?, *JAMA* **282**(9): 867-874.
5. Armitage-Chan E (2017). Developing teaching to improve the well-being of future vets, *Vet Rec* **181**(1): i-ii.

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Monday 5th November to Sunday 2nd December

Certificate of Advanced Veterinary Practice

The CertAVP at the RVC encourages independent, adult-centred and self-directed learning. The aim of the assessment process is not only to support you to fully understand the quality of your current clinical practice but also to encourage critical and reflective practice, foster life-long learning skills and advance your clinical knowledge, skills and understanding.

For full course details about these and other courses we provide see www.rvc.ac.uk/cpd



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