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Recent Grad Reflects on His Veterinary Education

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by Patrick A. Mahaney, V'99

A 1999 University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine graduate, I received an excellent clinical foundation on which to build my own methods of practice. Before I completed my first year, I recognized the value of my veterinary education. It has lived up to its potential, and its true value has no price tag. The critical thinking methodologies Penn emphasizes during the entire four-year education trains the future veterinarian to maintain multiple perspectives while thoroughly working up a case.

When I entered Penn, I anticipated going into general companion animal practice and hoped to specialize in a discipline.

Before beginning my veterinary education, I worked as a veterinary technician in both general and emergency practices, which gave me an insight about the services offered by each type of practice. With a greater interest in emergency practice, I worked part-time as an overnight emergency surgery technician at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (VHUP), while a veterinary student.

This allowed me to gain additional experience with surgical situations I would potentially

face as either a general or emergency practitioner. The practical experience also helped me to better understand the surgical theory I was learning in the classroom. My classmates who worked in other areas of VHUP also felt that their jobs enhanced their learning experience as a result of the hands-on exposure to subjects previously seen only in textbooks.



As I progressed through Penn and gained additional clinical experience, I developed an interest in diagnostic imaging and planned to pursue a radiology residency. To be considered for a residency, I had to first complete an internship program. Although the prospect of the rigors of an internship was daunting, I recognized the program's ability to enhance my clinical skills and make me a bet-

ter practitioner. In 2000, I completed a companion animal rotating internship at Friendship Hospital for Animals in Washington, D.C. Unfortunately, I was not accepted into radiology residencies that I applied for 2000-03.

Upon completion of the internship, I needed an alternative practice plan in order to continue gaining clinical experience. I entered general practice for approximately a year and a half, but desired to return to emergency medicine and surgery. Therefore, I accepted an emergency-only position at Metropolitan Emergency Animal Clinic (MEAC) in Rockville, Md. Emergency practice allows for more extensive use of the clinical education I began at Penn and sharpened during my internship. The heavy caseload requires quick assessment of clinical presentations, initiation of diagnostic modalities, and commencement of appropriate treatment protocols.

For the first time, I am truly enjoying clinical practice. This sense of fulfillment stems from the fact that I feel that each work shift is reminiscent of a continuing education seminar. Every time I go to work, I am faced with new learning opportunities and diagnostic challenges. In particular, I have effectively diagnosed and treated cases of hemopericardium and spontaneous bilateral pneumothorax.

The challenges are reminiscent of those I faced at VHUP, but I now enjoy the added pressures and responsibilities that once intimidated me as a student. Emergency practice does have qualities that make it less appealing than general practice to many veterinarians, including working odd hours and long shifts, and dealing with less-than-familiar case presentations and an intense work environment. General practice does hold advantages over emergency practice, as many of my classmates find enjoyment in working a regular daytime schedule, establishing a consistent client base, and promoting patient wellness through all stages of life.

The education my classmates and I received at Penn provided us with an excellent framework to the way we approach clinical cases. We feel that the faculty and staff emphasized the importance of taking a thorough history, performing an organized physical exam, assessing each problem as part of a differential list, and developing a treatment plan. Following the Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan (SOAP) format when working up each case allows for visualization of the entire clinical picture, therefore treatment of the whole animal. They also stressed the significance of maintaining excellent medical records, as our records are truly representative of the way we practice. Keeping thorough medical records and SOAPing each case have become cornerstones of my practice style.

As each VHUP clinical rotation through a specific discipline was consistently busy, we "Pennwets" had an advantage over our peers at other veterinary schools. To get the most out of each rotation, though, little time was available to focus on topics other than those relevant to the particular discipline. However, the pressure on us to multitask and manage our time helped develop skills applicable to any type of veterinary practice. In addition, I wished that our rotations required additional interaction with clients, either through actual contact or simulations.

Effective communication skills are not easily taught, but more emphasis on their development early in the education process could be advantageous to the new graduate upon entering clinical practice. The ability to communicate well stems from a clinician's ability to convey a sense of both competence and trustworthiness. As my experience increases, I notice a similar increase in my client communication skills. At MEAC, the clients seeking emergency care for their pets are well

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educated and expect thorough diagnostic workups. I feel an obligation to increase client awareness by providing complete explanations of their pet's diagnostics, treatment, and prognosis.

Although I have reached my current position by taking a route different than the one I intended, the veterinary medical education that I received at Penn has greatly contributed to my satisfaction as a practitioner today. At this point, I am uncertain if I will reapply for a radiology residency, as emergency practice provides me with professional satisfaction and educational and financial compensation. Owning an emergency practice or specialty service will likely occur in my future, as I recognize the opportunities that business management offers in furthering my veterinary career.

Overall, my classmates and I feel that no veterinary degree program can provide enough education or experience to make a new graduate instantly competent as a veterinarian. The ability to succeed as a practitioner must come from within. Our successes come from our own desires combined with the strong veterinary education we received at Penn.

Patrick Mahaney is a veterinarian practicing emergency medicine and surgery in Rockville, Md. Patrick lives in Washington, D.C., and enjoys the city's many cultural offerings and yoga studios.

Sports Medicine Symposium for Equine Practitioners

Saturday, Nov. 16 and Sunday, November 17th, 2002

Registration/participation fee: \$175: Saturday only; \$200: Saturday plus Sunday wet labs.

November 16: Lecture Topics

- Performance problems in the Race Horse - Dr. Ben Martin
 - Performance problems in the Sport Horse - Dr. Elizabeth Davidson
 - Cardiovascular Problems in the Equine Athlete - Dr. Virginia Reef
 - Obscure Lameness Problems in the Equine Athlete - Dr. Mike Ross
 - Exercise Physiology: What You Need to Know - Dr. Ric Birks
 - Evaluation of Cardiac Output and Myocardial Function in Exercising Horses - Dr. Mary Durando
 - Muscular Problems associated with Poor Performance - Dr. Jill Beech
 - Motion Correction for Standing Equine MRI - Dr. Lexi Lawrence
 - Suspensory desmitis and its response to treatment with high energy extracorporeal shock wave therapy - Dr. Olga Seco
 - Where we stand and where we are moving toward with respiratory surgery - Dr. Eric Parente
- All presenters with exception of Dr. Mary Durando are New Bolton Center faculty/clinicians*

November 17: Wet Labs

- Station A - High speed treadmill demonstration
 - Station B - Endoscopic evaluation of upper airway dysfunction detected at speed
 - Case discussions at 2 stations - half of participants in each group
 - Station C - Lameness videos
 - Station D - Scintigraphic case evaluations
- CE credits: 8 hours
 Registration limited to 80 for Saturday sessions, 60 (max.) for Sunday wet labs
 Saturday Sessions will be held in Woerner Amphitheatre, George D. Widener Hospital for Large Animals, New Bolton Center, Kennett Square, Pa.
 Wet Labs to be held in the new Scott Equine Sports Medicine Building, Jeffords Treadmill Building, Scintigraphy station, New Bolton Center.
 Please contact Office of Development, New Bolton Center, for detailed information and registration forms. Tel: 610-444-5800. ext. 2500 or email Patricia Hall at <phall@vet.upenn.edu>

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Annual income	\$1,600	\$1,675	\$1,800	\$1,975	\$2,225	\$2,375

\$25,000 Charitable Gift Annuity, Income Deferred to Age 65

Age	35	40	45	50	55	60
Rate	34.2%	26.4%	20.2%	15.3%	11.6%	8.7%
Income tax deduction	\$12,796	\$12,267	\$11,794	\$11,355	\$10,737	\$9,995
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