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Photo: Jobie Ryzak, AHT

THE MENTORSHIP ADVANTAGE FOR STUDENTS ... AND FOR MENTORING PRACTICES

From all indications, mentorship is once again a very hot topic. In fact, there are so many discussions about mentorship in every profession lately, it's clear that mentorship is still being recognized for its importance, in new ways, and in all kinds of different professional settings.

It is widely understood that mentorship supports individuals today in their current roles, but also provides a broader vantage point to what might be the path ahead toward future opportunities. The professional partnerships that result from mentorship teams are as common as they are beneficial because mentorship is more than a one-way 'teacher and student'

impacting of wisdom. It's a multi-directional array of understanding, knowledge and experience that benefits everyone involved. Much more than information is shared and all involved parties benefit. Any mentored student (or 'mentee') will tell you that a good mentor provides support, understanding, a listening ear and helpful feedback. In this way, burgeoning confidence is nurtured and helped to blossom into steady and confident proficiency. In the same way, mentors repeatedly describe the satisfaction they feel passing on their experience and helping young professionals come in to their own. Mentorship has a long-standing

tradition in many professions. 'Intern', 'apprentice' and 'journeyman' are different names for a mentored person. These periods which mark the transition from student to practitioner have become institutions of their own, yet the forms mentorship can take range from such structured approaches all the way down to something as simple as a one good, inspiring conversation.

In the same way, mentorship has a long history in the Saskatchewan veterinary profession. Currently, the WCVM is in the process of developing a multi-faceted approach to growing a culture that supports mentorship objectives and is highlighted by a philosophy

that sees mentees as being agents of their own success in mentorship scenarios. Workshops and curriculum tie-ins in all years of the veterinary program are expected to contribute to such a culture of mentorship.

Another element of our provincial mentorship culture already in place is the Summer Student Mentorship Program (SSMP) sponsored by the SVMA and SK Agriculture, an annual program which aims to provide Saskatchewan origin veterinary students at the WCVM with exposure to as many aspects of modern livestock and rural agri-food practice as possible during the summer. By providing first and second

year students an agriculture-based practice experience that showcases this career path in a positive manner and by demonstrating the range of both professional and lifestyle options to be found in the agri-food sector in rural Saskatchewan, the mentorship program gives students the context to seriously consider food animal or mixed practice as an attractive career option. Experience in a rural practice early in a student's veterinary education encourages more graduates to pursue employment in livestock or mixed animal practices in Saskatchewan and helps ensure adequate veterinary service is available in the future to serve Saskatchewan's expanding livestock production sector.

Veterinarians from different types of practices do things, see things and think about things in different ways. Individual livestock producers and other clients are equally as diverse in their ways of handling livestock and managing their production units. Exposing students to food animal practise from many points of view is one of the strengths of the SSMP. From the day-to-day activities of a practitioner dealing with animals to billing and other commercial aspects of the practice, mentors have seemingly endless opportunities to teach their mentee students. Discussing the client base of the practice, from hobby farms to intensive livestock production operations, the various skill and knowledge levels regarding animal husbandry, and the clients' acceptance and use of modern or innovative production practises are just some of the many, many pieces

of knowledge that only come from real-time experience in veterinary practise.

Mentors should strive to instill confidence in their mentee students for their advancing knowledge and understanding of health care in food animal production and the business of raising livestock as the summer progresses. This student could potentially become a new

“ One of the responsibilities to our profession over the long haul is to groom or mentor young and new members of the veterinary profession. The continuance of the standards we have set for ourselves is dependent on this.

associate who would then be dealing with your clients after joining the practice, and new associates make better impressions on clients if they can demonstrate a reasonable level of familiarity with the principles and the language associated with the various livestock sectors.

Mentorship has a long tradition because it not only helps mentees reduce the likelihood of repeating the same mistakes past generations have made. Mentors benefit in many ways as well. As mentors are helping give young colleagues a leg up, they may remember back to support and guidance received from their own mentors when they were starting out. It's also beneficial for everyone in the clinic to revisit the hows and whys of different tasks and roles from time to time.

Mentoring is a way to pass wisdom on to a new generation of veterinary colleagues after learning by trial and error. (SVMA mentors currently characterize it as 'paying it forward'.) Yet it also provides another mechanism to achieve business goals: it helps enable better understanding of how the next generation of workers communicates and what its priorities are.

What is involved with becoming a mentor, financially? Practices are responsible for providing mentorship and support to a student applicant for fourteen (14) weeks during the period commencing early in May of the program year. A stipend of \$6,000 is provided by SK Agriculture and the SVMA for the 14 week period. Financial support over and above the stipend amount must be provided by the practice in the form of cash or a combination of cash and in-kind contributions that equals at least \$3,000. In-kind contributions such as suitable living accommodations, board and room or travel support, to a maximum of \$1,500 for the 14 week period, are allowed. Practices may provide financial support above the \$3,000 minimum.

The SVMA provides each mentoring practice with three equal payments of \$2,000 over the summer (end of May, end of June and end of July). While the 14 week mentorship period normally extends into August, there is no wage support paid beyond the end of July, so owners and managers need to know they will be paid 3 (and only 3) equal amounts over the 14 week period.

We often get questions about how to go about deducting taxes from student stipends. Mentoring practices use the funds provided by the SVMA toward wages paid to the student. Standard deductions must be made from a student's gross wages, and the workers compensation program is mandatory. Disability and other insurance are the responsibility of the student.

If you are interested in mentoring a student, keep an ear open for interested Saskatchewan origin candidates in their first or second years at the WCVM. It is up to them to approach you about setting up a mentorship term, but some great potential candidates you are already acquainted with may not know about the mentorship program yet. Alternatively, contact the SVMA office and let us know you are interested in taking on a student for the summer, and we'll let interested applicants know.

A few comments from past 'mentee' students:

"I was able to work with several amazing mentors: veterinarians and veterinary technicians alike. Each provided me with a different wealth of knowledge, whether it be teaching me hands on skills that I would use day