Reviewer's report

Title: The transition into veterinary practice: opinions of recent graduates and final year students

Version: 1 Date: 27 April 2011

Reviewer: Rosanne Taylor

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The paper presents detailed, current comparison of recent graduate and final year veterinary students opinions of which attributes are most important for commencing practice. It adds to the literature on this subject, but does not acknowledge or refer to key earlier studies undertaken outside the UK, or place the aspects which are rather specific to the UK veterinary education model into the broader international context. Final year students and graduates have different drivers and outcomes required, and are assessed/evaluated differently, so the difference in emphasis of what matters most is not surprising. Also new graduates only represent a snapshot of a veterinary career, so many of the lower-ranked attributes are likely to become much more important later in their careers, eg learn-to learn skills, information literacy, business acumen and VPH/emerging disease recognition.

1. Major compulsory revisions

1.1 Introduction and Discussion. REquire a more thorough and analytical discussion of findings relative to published literature. Need to compare with those from previous, similar studies undertaken in USA, Canada, Australia and elsewhere over past decade, e.g Walsh’s report of recent graduate and staff #Defining the attributes expected of graduating veterinary medical students, part 2: external evaluation and outcomes assessment (Walsh DA, BI Osburn, RL Schumacker, Spring 2002; 29(1): 36-42) and Hardin JVME 34:5 p683-688, 2007. Walsh et al JAVMA 219:1358 (2001)

1.2 Results. Rework table 1 and 2. Currently these appear to be so highly overlapping as to be redundant. The rationale for separately presenting important/very important and very important data only is not explained. There may be alternative ways to present the differences that are revealed by analysing data in both ways- the question is, what is the significance of the differences revealed by the two different tables?

1.3 Methods

Provide sufficient description of the methods used for selecting students/grads for interview, questions asked, and structure of analysis of explanatory comments- to enable someone to repeat the work.

1.4 discussion.
Discuss the importance of graduate attributes including non technical skills like communication being taught in an appropriate context. There is an extensive literature on this, for example Barrie, S Higher Education REsearch and development 51:214-241, 2006. The context for learning makes a large difference to the way students engage with developing these attributes.

1.5 Context

The paper assumes a good to excellent knowledge of the typical UK vet school curriculum and intricacies of RCVS requirements (day 1 and year 1) which are less familiar to international readers, e.g. in discussion the reference to Selbourne, 1997. Provide more explanation of the curriculum structure common to the 3 schools and assessments used in final year (which clearly drive students perceptions of what is most important, paritcularly the knowledge base required).

2. Minor essential revisions

2.1. Don't use the term "vet" in shorthand- has a different meaning in USA
2.2 Identify number of respondents, response rate etc in abstract
2.3 Table legends- not at all clear- reword,
2.4 address the very small sample size of interview material, selection of interviews, structure and validation of analysis methods used
2.5 Number the interview comments to show where they came from same individual
2.6 Don't shorthand to "final years"

3. Discretionary revisions

3.1 Introduction. the point on workplace dissatisfaction and stress is linked to graduate attributes, but no evidence presented that better developed grad attributes makes veterinarians more likely to succeed in practice (sadly, it can often be the highest achievers who suffer most profound distress as practice can fail to meet their expectations or enable their professional development)

3.2 Conclusion/discussion might reflect on the different outcomes and assessment/evaluation that final year and new grad vets are subject to and the impact this has on their perceptions of what is most important. Do these students sit final year exams, for example?

3.3. Table 3 the format for a makes the second part of the table unclear

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**
'I declare that I have no competing interests'