



TRENDS IN VETERINARY NURSING

Best Practices for Training Veterinary Nurses

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Training and the pursuit of knowledge in the veterinary practice are ongoing, from brand new hires to your most experienced veterinary nurses. Supervisors and shift leads can create effective, efficient, and innovative educational opportunities in the clinical setting to aid training and professional advancement. Fostering and supporting these experiences can bring the best out of your staff and improve patient health outcomes. But where does one begin?



This article will explore best practices in adult learning and use that understanding to discuss how to enhance educational content delivery, improve assessment and application, and empower employees to encourage lifelong learning.

ADULT LEARNING

In traditional K–12 education, child-based learning is centered on an instructor's selection of material. The instructor decides how the material is delivered, the pace of the lesson, and the resources the students need to be successful.¹ This approach works well for younger individuals because they rely on the guidance of an instructor, as they lack experience and knowledge.

However, adults learn differently due to their previous knowledge, experiences, and encounters with others. Adult learning, also known as andragogy, acknowledges that adults learn based on a need to address everyday responsibilities, improve performance, and resolve issues or concerns. In adult learning, there is more independence, and the pursuit of knowledge is collaborative between the instructor/trainer and the student.¹

For example, a shift lead who is in charge of ensuring staff is trained on a new piece of lab equipment recognizes that the staff may have previous knowledge of similar equipment, creating an open discussion and collaboration for learning. The staff needs to learn how to use this equipment to do their jobs effectively; therefore, their motivation to be successful will drive their desire to master the task. The shift lead would provide necessary resources while encouraging staff to read about the equipment or engage in self-directed professional development.

In addition to self-directed learning, staff can be empowered to manage their own learning, setting them up to be lifelong learners. Self-managed learning, also known as heutagogy, acknowledges that adult learners take advantage of their own quest for knowledge, initiating learning prior to a specific need arising, and reflecting on how they can improve their environment.¹

Since the clinical environment changes constantly and can be unpredictable, staff should be encouraged and empowered to continue to learn as they go and reflect on areas where they can improve. For example, creating SMART (i.e., Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goals defines the purpose and



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intention of the topic or area of interest of the staff member and promotes self-management of learning.²

METHODS TO IMPROVE IN-PRACTICE LEARNING

Learning does not have to take place formally or be limited to meetings, and the supervisor or manager can use the dynamic of adult learning to create a positive environment of self-directed and self-managed learning. There are several avenues to incorporate learning, training, and dissemination of information.

Meetings

Meetings represent a more traditional avenue that can be streamlined with a direct purpose and goal, making the best use of time. For example, meetings can be used to update staff on new protocols, products, techniques, and systems and to introduce new staff. However, meetings may be limited due to time, scheduling, and employee participation. According to the Harvard Business Review, employees in general industry prefer fewer in-person and virtual meetings.³ The research also shows that productivity and motivation of staff increase with fewer scheduled meetings and that staff have improved relationships with managers and more trust in supervisors when meetings are few but meaningful.³

Other Avenues

Outside of more formal avenues and meetings, retention can be improved through engaging, on-going training initiatives. This can be accomplished using several modalities, both in-person and virtual. Topics can range from those which improve clinical skills to mental health, self-improvement skills such as communication, making workplace connections, and problem resolution.⁴ Staff members benefit from gaining new skill sets, which can contribute to a



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positive clinical environment and boost of confidence. However, training needs to be pertinent, applicable, and current.⁴ Incorporating new methods of delivery can create a variety of appealing training opportunities.

Remember, adult learners appreciate bringing their own experiences and have a desire to improve their own knowledge. Therefore, consider ways to make the delivery engaging and collaborative.

Scenario-Based Learning

Scenarios can be created around a topic of the day, week, and/or month, and individual and group experiences can be incorporated. This can be helpful for new graduates or staff to learn new skills and to improve the knowledge of more experienced staff. If staff are hesitant or unable to develop a scenario, sentence frames can be used for momentum. For example, if the topic is diabetes, "Patient X presents with Y symptoms and could benefit from Z." The finished product can be shared at the beginning or end of a shift, rotating so time is not taken away from clinical or patient time. In addition to in-person presenting, these could be posted on a digital forum for all to read, recorded as a clinic podcast, or printed out for staff members to review in a specified time frame.

Game-Based Learning

The use of asynchronous methods could also be helpful in delivering training or new information to staff. Staff would engage with the learning independently, ideally using time on-site to increase motivation. These methods do not need to be time-consuming and should be compensated while on the clock.

Drawings are a fun way to encourage staff to share what they already know or promote self-paced learning to share with others. For example, as popularized on social media, staff can post a drawing and others can try to

figure out what it represents. There could be a parasite of the week, where everyone draws an internal or external parasite, or draw microscope findings with or without explanation.

There are also engaging game-based learning platforms that can be played either synchronously or asynchronously, such as Kahoot!, Quizizz, Blooket, or Gimkit. Each staff member can contribute to the creation of the game, creating questions and answers based on topic (e.g., Cushing's versus Addison's disease), so it is not solely the job of the manager or shift lead. Staff members can vote on topics, and topics can be based on cases in the clinic or interesting news in veterinary medicine.

Peer-Led Learning

Finally, individual or groups of staff members can teach each other subject areas they are passionate about, using digital platforms such as Google Classroom or Microsoft Teams. For example, someone may be passionate about new anesthesia protocols and can create a discussion or presentation on Google Classroom, and everyone else can either contribute to the discussion, add to the presentation, or share their own experiences.

Professional Development

Promote the choice of professional development that appeals to staff members with content already created by other veterinary nurses, veterinary organizations, industry partners, journals, and other outside resources. For example, if there is a conference in the area, consider sending all levels of staff and rotating for everyone who would like the chance to attend. Staff members can select the lectures they feel best suits their role or interest and keep a journal or record of what they learned. This can be used as a positive addition to their file or performance review, demonstrating continuous learning.

Assessment

Assessments provide feedback for the staff member to improve performance, develop a new skill set, and demonstrate knowledge. Feedback shouldn't be punitive; it should be used as a tool and resource to inspire growth and provide constructive criticism. Employer assessment is not limited to formal tests or quizzes—it can include competency lists, skill checks,

and application evaluation. For example, a shift lead can complete a skill check after a game-based training on a new radiology technique, providing feedback to the staff member for review, improvement, or praise. This can also provide feedback for the manager to determine if the training needs to be revised.

Employees need to be provided opportunities for self-assessment, promoting self-reflection. SMART goals can be created for the short-, medium-, or long-term, and can focus on areas of new learning, improvements, and personal interests. In addition to SMART goals, managers can help staff reflect using the glow/grow technique. With this technique, used in K–12 education, students are encouraged to identify their strong and weak points, and the instructor provides feedback.⁵ Staff members can identify their strengths and weaknesses using a written or digital 2-column chart and use that information to create goals, focus on specific areas for more training, or find areas where new training would be beneficial.

POST-TRAINING FOLLOW-UP

Finally, follow-up is critical to ensure any training was adequate and complete. After assessments are complete, managers can provide next steps for staff members to continue learning and training through application. Post-assessment conferences with staff can give the individual an opportunity to clarify and have a conversation with managers regarding feedback.⁶ Developing plans of action provides an opportunity for both the manager and staff member to set shared goals and develop strategies to apply the training to the workplace. Post-training surveys can be completed by the entire team to gauge value and success of the training. Meeting with the team to get shared feedback regarding the training also provides the manager with general advice on the development of future trainings and opportunities for learning.

Upcoming Events

October 16-18, 2023 Vet Nurse+Tech HiVE, Austin, Texas

January 13-17, 2024 VMX, Orlando, Florida

Visit navc.com/calendar for more information.

SUMMARY

Training provides a wealth of knowledge and learning opportunities for all staff, enriching patient outcomes, building clinical skills, and evolving the field of veterinary medicine. Staff members want meaningful and thorough training, and managers can create effective learning environments while maintaining a busy clinic. Everyone benefits from more knowledge through effective training, shared experiences, reflection, and lifelong learning. **TVN**

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