

Internships, mentorship and ethics: What are we doing?

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An internship is not just a one-year contracted experience; it is the beginning of an individual's professional life. Creating a positive and effective experience can build momentum for an individual's career, while a negative or ineffective experience can hamper or even derail a career.

The AVMA, AAEP and Veterinary Internship and Residency Matching Program

(VIRMP) have published definitions and guidelines for internships on their websites. Each specifically addresses the primary purpose of an internship, which is to provide an educational experience for the intern as opposed to solely a service benefit to the organization. For veterinarians organizing internships and participating as mentors, ethics plays a large role. The ethics of internships can be divided into three main components: the ethics of the overall internship, the ethics toward the interns and the ethics demonstrated for the interns.

Ethics of the overall internship

The ethics of the overall internship begins with the mentoring veterinarian or practice taking ownership of the internship. Ethical practice requires (1) understanding the specific best practice recommendations offered by the AAEP/VIRMP for internships, (2) critically evaluating the ability of the practice to fulfill those recommendations before committing to an internship, and (3) frequently assessing the fulfillment of those recommendations. Do you have the capability to fulfill the requirements? Can you honestly and frequently evaluate if you are meeting those responsibilities in practice? Are you willing to solicit, hear and act on feedback from participants concerning the ability of your practice to meet those expectations? Practices and individuals that do not honestly evaluate or represent their capabilities to provide effective internships are not practicing ethical mentorship.

Ethics toward the interns

The ethics toward the interns is a large part of responsible and effective mentorship. When evaluating this component, it's helpful to consider ethics as the moral principles that govern a person's behavior or conduct. Are interns treated as colleagues who are seeking additional training or as a medium for the practice to achieve success and/or financial solvency? When does effective learning through extensive mentored experience give way

to overwork and exhaustion? Does the offered compensation meet basic industry standards for the level of experience and educational benefits, or does it take advantage of the intern's need to complete the experience and push them to accept substandard compensation?

This component must be evaluated in some way beyond self-reflection; it is not enough for an individual or practice to consider for themselves if they are treating the interns ethically, but also needs to include evaluation by participating interns or evaluation by outside colleagues as well as monitoring of industry standards and research regarding things such as compensation during training and restriction of duty hours (Adin *et al.* 2018).

Ethics demonstrated for the interns

The ethics demonstrated for the interns critically influences the future behavior of interns as veterinary professionals. This component is woven into the fabric of the internship and ingrained in the culture of the practice. In didactic learning, ethics may be a formal stand-alone class or discussed throughout various courses, and ethics are often presented as black and white rules and hindsight-based discussions on what went wrong in cases unfamiliar to the discussants.



During an internship, ethics can be learned through intentional discussions (and should be) as part of the formalized internship curriculum (Vertrees *et al.* 2012). Beyond that, ethics are learned on a different level in real-world situations, often without specific intention. What choice will be made when a high-value trainer demands medication for the barn without an associated specific patient and condition? Are rules or standards of care bent or broken to help achieve a financial or competitive advantage and what justifies this? How are

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ETHICAL PRACTICE
Every Day-Every Time

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competing or referring practitioners treated and talked about within the practice? When medical errors or mistakes in treatment occur, are they hidden? How are staff treated within the practice?

Ethics are demonstrated within a culture on macro and micro levels. The macro ethics are usually right in our faces and demand conscious decisions that are often clearly demonstrated to others. The micro ethics are little moment-to-moment decisions and choices that subconsciously influence mentees and help shape their future character. Practices and practitioners offering internship experiences should be attentive to what their culture is and what they are teaching intern veterinarians on both the macro and the micro level. Practices offering internships should formalize discussions of ethics and decision making similar to rounds on patient or disease-based topics. This discussion should include a case-based didactic approach (Vertrees *et al.* 2012) as this offers an advantage over theoretical academic discussions. Themes that can be explored include client interactions, communication with clients, veterinary versus client preferences, challenges and conflicts associated with learning, financial issues, relationships with industry representatives, etc. (Carrese *et al.* 2011). In case-based discussion, clinical

ethical reasoning as a practice should be encouraged, with the consideration of the medical facts, the medical goals, the client goals and the context of the situation included. (Kaldjian *et al.* 2005)

Providing and maintaining an internship experience is not simply about teaching early-career veterinarians the best way to suture or inject distal hock joints. It is about guiding an experience that influences the next generation of practitioners. Internship providers should intentionally consider what they create as a culture, how they handle discussion of macro ethical issues and how they demonstrate micro ethics on a moment-to-moment basis because that will be what directs the future of our profession.

Footnotes:

Adin, C.A., Foggie, C.A., and Marks, S.L. (2017) Duty hours restriction for surgical trainees: an ethical obligation or a bad idea? *Vet Surg.* 47, 327-332.

Carrese, J.A., McDonald, E.L., et al. (2011) Everyday ethics in internal medicine resident clinic: an opportunity to teach. *Medical Education.* 45, 712-721.

Kaldjian, L.C., Weir, R.F., and Duffy, T.P. (2005) A clinician's approach to clinical ethical reasoning. *J Gen Intern Med.* 20, 306-311.

Vertrees, S.M., Shuman, A.G., and Fins, J.J. Learning by doing: effectively incorporating ethics education into residency training. *J Gen Intern Med.* 28, 578-582.

ASSOCIATION

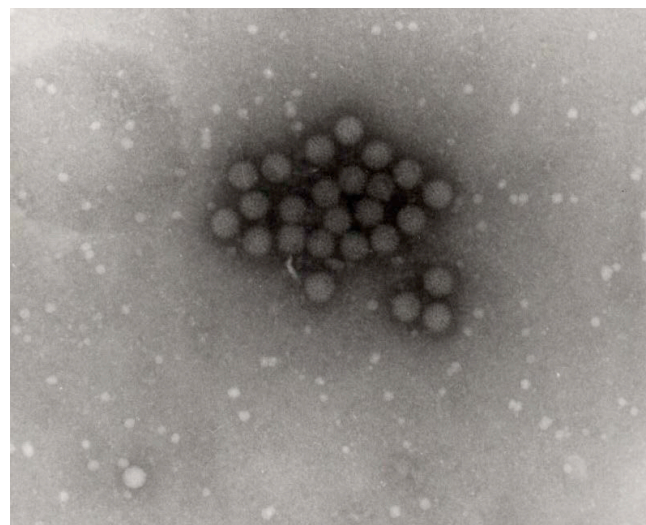
Access new Rotavirus Guidelines on AAEP website

Comprehensive guidelines for the identification, management and prevention of rotavirus, a leading cause of diarrhea in foals up to six months of age at horse breeding centers worldwide, are now available on the AAEP's website.

Published as a PDF file, the Rotavirus Guidelines document conveniently summarizes the disease's clinical signs, risk factors, diagnostic methods, control measures, biosecurity issues and other management protocols.

The guidelines were created at the request of the AAEP's Infectious Disease Committee by Dr. Roberta Dwyer, equine extension veterinarian and professor at the University of Kentucky; and Dr. Ashley Whitehead, senior instructor in equine clinical sciences at the University of Calgary. Drafted guidelines were then reviewed and approved by the committee and the AAEP's board of directors.

"Rotavirus is one of the most common pathogens in major breeding areas worldwide," said Dr. Dwyer. "Early recognition, diagnosis, treatment and biosecurity in cases of foal diarrhea are key to minimizing disease impacts to breeding farms."



Electron micrograph of equine rotaviruses.

View the Rotavirus Guidelines or save them to your phone or tablet for future reference at aaep.org/guidelines/infectious-disease-control/using-guidelines. AAEP guidelines for 17 other equine infectious diseases are also available through the site.