



EMS in Covid times

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Contact information for all AVS Officers, committee members and reps can be found at www.avsukireland.co.uk/who-we-are

From the editor

Elizabeth Stephenson, JAVS Editor

Hello, hello, thank you for picking up JAVS, it's much appreciated given the steep learning curve I've been on since taking on the role from Katie earlier this year.



Here we are again, with another year gone by and the 'Covid' word mentioned a few more times than most of us would have desired – enough that I would have still jumped at the vaccine even if it was an up-the-nose kennel-cough-style one. Life pre-Covid now feels like some sort of bizarre freedom of not worrying about sneezing in a public place or actually being able to book EMS less than a year in advance...wild, I know.

This year's edition of JAVS includes numerous articles touching on the role of vets within society, something that Covid has brought to the forefront when contact with others within a community has perhaps inevitably stalled. Our value as vets-to-be extends so far beyond our clinical ability and Covid has thrown this into a new light. Small favours, words of comfort and relationships you can rely on stand out more in your mind when you have limited contact with others and most of your daily interactions are in pixel form.

This issue also highlights some of the hobbies that vet students undertake during their time at vet school and as we, with luck, move into a less restricted next 12 months, I hope you'll find some that might persuade you to have a bash at something new or crack on with that thing you said you always wanted to try. Personally, the idea of trying to scoop a ball while sitting on the back of a horse (check out the polocrosse article) is well beyond my skill set but I have always said I wanted to start doing yoga... For me, time spent outdoors in the mountains, either climbing, running, cold water swimming or just being among nature with my faithful collies, has been a lifeline for the past year.

Do drop me a line if you have an article that's been sitting at the back of your mind and you can't quite cajole it onto paper. I'm always happy to offer assistance and it'd be great to encourage more students to contribute.

For now, enjoy!

Elizabeth

AVS: here to help you – now and in the future

Calum McIntyre (AVS President 2021/22)

AS I write this, I find myself reminiscing. Last year's JAVS update from lizzie Arthur began with, 'The past 12 months have been nothing if not eventful...' It's safe to say the following 12 months have continued in a similar fashion! Since then all of us on the AVS committee have been striving to meet our mission – 'to holistically support veterinary students through their studies, represent their views and interests and engage them in the wider issues of the profession'. It's amazing how much can be accomplished in such a short period.

However, in reminiscing, I also think back to all the trials and tribulations of the past 12 months. We've had to overcome individual hurdles and balance shared worries as we've navigated our degrees precariously throughout the pandemic. I have been left in awe of vet students' amazing fortitude and resilience and this is a symbol of our remarkable student community.

The challenges of the pandemic have highlighted why AVS is so important to vet students. We may have missed out on another in-person Sports Weekend (but keep your eyes out for our upcoming Sports Weekend event), but AVS offers so much more.

The key theme has continued to be support. We've looked to develop new methods of supporting vet students through their studies, while bolstering existing initiatives. This has included offering grants, such as our student experience grants alongside BVA, promoting the MSD student research bursary and the AVS and VDS Training EMS grants – with some fantastic articles being received from our grant winners too!

We also realise that it's been a bumpy ride. The brilliant Carpool Cases series offered the chance



Calum McIntyre, AVS President 2021/22

to gain some extra EMS, as we know EMS is a major concern for AVS' members. It's why we've been constantly liaising with the RCVS and EMS coordinators to ensure the best outcomes for students. I also realise that EMS concerns are ongoing and urge any student who feels they need additional support to contact their AVS rep or myself directly. The Carpool Cases EMS special, which aimed to answer concerns about EMS as we eased out of lockdown, ensured vet students were as up to date as possible and able to voice their concerns directly to those making key decisions.

However, things don't stop there as we have plenty more planned. Look out for the return of our popular VetKind conference, another Carpool Cases series and many other offerings.

The pandemic and its uncertainty have made apparent how crucially

a strong voice for vet students is needed. This is where, I believe, the AVS committee has come into its own. We've been raising your concerns and amplifying your voice. Whether it has been meeting with Student Union presidents or sitting on RCVS or Vet Schools Council committees, we've continually striven to represent you on the issues that matter. Somehow, my not-so-dulcet Glaswegian tones even ended up on national news highlighting the circumstances faced by vet students over the pandemic. All of the committee have had

personal correspondence with students up and down the country, relaying and acting on their feedback and concerns.

But it's not just about the here and now. We've proactively been looking to better vet students' circumstances for the future. We've been lobbying the Office for Students to ensure that the National Student Survey (NSS) better serves vet students, incorporating questions specific to placements and inclusion on courses. With the NSS tied to university rankings and funding, this will not only help the delivery of courses but will also help guide prospective applicants. As part of this lobbying, we've entered discussions with the National Union of Students to highlight the challenges facing vet students. This has led to us contacting the Student Loans Company and now the Department of Education to emphasise disparities in student

financing and the additional financial constraints faced by vet students. Our VetYou financial webinars are another avenue of financial guidance. In other words, we're here to help you now and in the future.

We've also been evaluating our social responsibilities, looking internally and externally, to ensure we can best serve our membership. It's imperative, with AVS members being the future of the profession, that we help guide the profession to be the one we envisage. For all, this should be one that is founded in empathy and compassion, promoting fair treatment and allowing us all to immerse ourselves in inclusive cultures. This has been incorporated into our lobbying efforts and included in our activities such as Carpool Cases, with an upcoming 'inclusive cultures' special. Notably we've also worked closely with other groups, such as BVEDS (the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society) and BVCIS (British Veterinary Chronic Illness Support),

“No matter where you find yourself now, despite the tough circumstances, you've shown how much of a credit you will be to the profession”

with several projects underway and soon to be announced.

The above is a snippet of what we've been doing in the months since I became AVS President. I'd like to acknowledge how hard everyone in our community has had to work throughout the pandemic. No matter where you find yourself now, despite the tough circumstances, you've shown how much of a credit you will be to the profession. Thanks must also go to the vet schools and their staff and to the wider profession who have offered a huge amount of support to students. We are extremely thankful for this. Our fantastic AVS

committee members have also supported students and have worked incredibly hard to ensure vet students are represented wherever decisions affecting them are being made.

Personally, my calling to the profession was not solely to help animals. Rather it was also to help people. The more involved I have become with AVS and the wider profession the more I have realised that it's the people that make this journey, shared experience, and community so special. I believe this is AVS' fuel and a real motivation for the committee. It is an immense privilege to be able to represent our peers, the vet students across the UK and Ireland. We want to make a difference for you. With some uncertainty still looming and a new academic year underway, all members can rest assured that AVS will continue to offer our support.

Please don't hesitate to contact us, whether it's via your university reps, committee inbox or a member of AVS exec directly.



Carpool Cases

Carpool Cases, created especially for students, are informal online meetings where we bring together veterinary professionals, our host BVA Senior Vice President James Russell, and students from all over the UK and Ireland, to have an open conversation about a chosen topic.

Visit www.bva.co.uk/carpool-cases to sign up to attend events or watch recordings of previous sessions.

**Calling all
vet students!**



Mining diamonds of knowledge and experience in the virtual era

Jennifer Simpson (Sixth year, Cambridge) and Laura Copley (Fifth year, Nottingham)

2020 marked the 60th anniversary of the Veterinary Public Health Association (VPHA) and, back in March last year, a joint VPHA–Association of Government Vets (AGV) spring conference, 'Mining Diamonds', was going to be held in a hotel in Leicester to celebrate the contribution of vets to One Health. The meeting was set to feature an afternoon workshop run by UK veterinary undergraduates. Sadly, the Covid-19 pandemic brought a halt to all plans for an in-person meeting and anniversary celebration and raised the question of how and when an alternative event could be held to mark the occasion.

A cohort of vet students, with representation from every vet school in the UK, came together, determined to reimagine the conference they had helped to plan in a virtual format. Working alongside

the VPHA conference organisers, a novel online conference week was planned for 10–17 October 2020.

Prerecorded presentations by five excellent speakers were made available on YouTube and circulated to all conference delegates. Professor Lord Trees discussed the contribution of vets to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, while Dr Rens van Dobbenburgh highlighted the evolving roles and responsibilities of EU official veterinarians. Dr Rakesh Chand gave a fascinating insight into the growth of the international insect trade; Anthony Ridge discussed the crucial role of vets in safeguarding animal health, animal welfare and public health in international trade; and Lucy Johnson reviewed animal welfare cases as reported by official veterinarians at UK abattoirs.

The prerecorded lectures offered

great flexibility as they could be watched, rewatched and paused throughout, helping delegates gain as much as possible from the insights of experienced individuals in veterinary public health.

During the conference week, members of the cohort of organising vet students hosted four online discussion sessions with graduate members of the profession to debate some open questions about the past, present and future role of the veterinary profession in One Health. In parallel, the students also hosted discussions within their own vet schools to gather student perspectives on the topic. These interactive sessions allowed many students, regardless of their previous knowledge, to have their say and take part in the debate on the broader impact of the veterinary profession in One Health.



The team of students who, with the support of Milorad Radakovic of Cambridge vet school, helped plan a virtual conference

On 17 October 2020, there was a final live Zoom call to conclude the conference. During this session, the student organisers collectively fed back on key findings from the week's discussions. Among the outcomes of the conference there were three proposals for which the majority of delegates present showed great support:

- a request for increased veterinary public health-related EMS opportunities for undergraduates;
- a proposal for opportunities for students to provide comments on consultation documents; and
- a request for more teaching on the environmental impact and sustainability strategies of the veterinary profession.

The VPHA and AGV presidents made some final remarks before the conference week was brought to a close.

The VPHA-AGV 2020 virtual conference week format was, as far as we are aware, one of the first of its kind. We were able to explore new educational platforms, maxim-



The Mining Diamonds conference logo

ise our potential for networking and 'mine diamonds' of knowledge and experience from graduate members of the profession, albeit virtually.

The event also brought together like-minded vet students to work as a team and run a successful event where graduates and students had so much to learn from each other. The

VPHA has since set up a VPHAmbassador scheme in which a representative from each vet school will act as an interface between the VPHA and the veterinary undergraduate body. This new network should pave the way for collaboration and potentially more student-led conferences in the future, whether in person or virtually.

Upon reflection, the Covid pandemic has had a huge impact on our learning with many

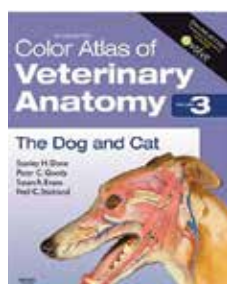
opportunities and events being cancelled. However, the restrictions have also forced us into unpredictable situations and pushed us to develop new transferable skills. 2020 certainly taught us to be flexible in the way we learn and the importance of embracing opportunities to try something new.

BOOK REVIEW

Detailed guide to clinical anatomy

Color Atlas of Veterinary Anatomy: Volume 3, The Dog and Cat, 2nd edn

SH Done, PC Goody, SA Evans, NC Strickland
Softback, 540 pages
Mosby Publishing, 2009; £72.18



Reviewed by Ollie Bardsley

You never know when you might need a quick anatomy refresher – be that 30 minutes before your final anatomy exam, before a practical exam or before beginning an important surgery. I have found this colour atlas to be an invaluable tool for my anatomy studies thus far. The authors embark on an extensive and organised dissection of the dog and draw comparisons with the cat. This can be an excellent tool for working out exactly what things look like in reality, and whereabouts they are relative to other anatomical sites in the body.

Volumes 1 and 2 of this series cover ruminant and equine dissection, respectively, and can make excellent

tools for further study of these species. Personally, I've stuck to using this one and referring to other anatomical texts for the other domestic species, to save my bookshelf from getting too full!

Because this book is so comprehensive, it is also sizeable – which means it might feel overwhelming to read. As a result, I use it as a reference guide rather than an anatomy textbook per se. However, I find it to be my 'go-to' book for ascertaining what something is that I'd otherwise struggle to identify.

I particularly found the sections on head and neck anatomy to be extremely useful. The head is a region rich in clinically relevant, important anatomical sites such as routes of the cranial nerves, blood vessels, components of the special senses and the brain. For me, studying the head was difficult as I struggled to work out where nerves were in relation to other things, where glands fitted between muscles, and where I could palpate different regions. I found this textbook to be the answer to fully grasping the make up of the head.

All-in-all, I would recommend this book to anybody studying veterinary anatomy, and will be keeping hold of my personal copy long into my career.

Tips on applying for the AVS/VDS Training EMS grants

Erica Cook (AVS Grants and Sponsorship Officer)

I WAS very pleased to have been elected as the AVS Grants and Sponsorship Officer this year. My aim is to help secure funding for more exciting EMS placements for students and to improve UK veterinary students' awareness of the support that AVS offers.

The AVS/VDS Training EMS grants help students to undertake UK-based EMS placements that they would not have normally been able to carry out because of financial constraints. VDS Training very kindly funds five £200 EMS grants, with the recipients being selected by an evaluation panel that includes the AVS Grants and Sponsorship Officer –, this year, that was me! I enjoyed the opportunity to help decide which applications stood out as the most worthy of receiving this grant.

We judged 27 applications in total, and I'm sure the whole panel will agree that there were some tough decisions to be made in choosing the top five applications. To make this slightly easier, we used a fair system to help rank the applications, judging every application in each of the following five categories.

Writing a competitive application

1. Fill out all the sections required in as much detail as possible. This means the judging panel gets a thorough, well-rounded view of why you especially need this grant.
2. Provide a detailed breakdown of your costs and budget as this helps the people judging your application to understand all the things you have considered regarding the need for financial help.
3. Clearly outline why the placement is crucial to your learning, including the objectives that you want to fulfil on this placement, that you can't elsewhere.

- Impact. What difference would the grant make to the applicant's veterinary career?

- Objectives. Has the candidate clearly outlined what they want to achieve from this placement?

- Financial need. What difference will the grant make to the applicant's ability to take the placement?

- Budgeting. How will the grant money be utilised?

- Placement information. What will this placement offer that others don't? Are there other options that may reduce costs such as travel or accommodation?

Reading about some of the fantastic EMS placements that students in the UK have managed to secure was inspiring, especially with the Covid

issues that we have all faced over the past 14 months. Having struggled to book EMS myself recently, the judging experience was a real insight into the challenges that other UK students face in undertaking such a crucial part of our course. Covid has amplified an already difficult area of undergraduate learning so it was great to hear of students getting back out into practice and to read first-hand the impact this grant would have for the students receiving it.

I'm really looking forward to starting work on providing more grants for vet students in the UK, so keep an eye on your emails, and on social media for AVS announcements of other grants that you could be eligible for – and then get writing your application!

An outstanding learning opportunity

AVS/VDS Training EMS grant recipient Heather Durkin describes the impact it has had on her progression as a vet student.

The AVS/VDS Training EMS grant has provided me with the opportunity to develop my veterinary clinical skills. Without the grant, I would not have been able to attend a fantastic placement in West Yorkshire, which offered me the chance to accomplish all my placement goals, and more! I was able to perform my first solo cat and dog castrations and assist with cow caesareans. I also learnt how to perform pregnancy diagnosis and scanning of dairy cows. I assisted with hernia repairs on piglets, colicky horses and more! It was an outstanding learning



opportunity and has had a positive impact on my confidence and knowledge as a future vet.

I wish that there were more opportunities to access grants like this, so that more students have the chance to learn and grow in a supportive setting, without the burden of financial limitations.

The application process was very straightforward and not at all cumbersome. I am so glad that I applied for the grant, as it provided me with one of the most valuable experiences I have had in my educational career. Thank you.

Gaining experience on which to build my professional future

Cara McNeill (Fourth year, Glasgow)

Hi! My name is Cara and I'm about to start my fourth year at Glasgow vet school. Earlier this year, I was fortunate enough to receive an AVS/VDS Training EMS grant, which enabled me to take up a live-in EMS placement at a 20-vet equine first-opinion and referral hospital. I hope you enjoy this snapshot of my time there.

Day 1

After a last-minute hiccup (the realisation I'd entered the small animal practice address into Google Maps, rather than that of the equine unit – oops!) I left home at some unearthly hour to get to the practice by 8 am, arriving, of course, far earlier than planned. I was greeted by a friendly receptionist and, this being Covid times, asked to take a lateral flow test before being allowed onto the premises.

Following an anxious wait and a negative result, I was welcomed by one of the residents and introduced to everybody. The practice offers intramural rotations placements for another vet school, so I was relieved to see some final-year students – at least I wouldn't be alone! After a long day spent observing and holding horses, I was shown to the static caravan that I would call home for the next three weeks. I grabbed a quick dinner and headed to bed,, exhausted but happy after a long day.

Day 2

Each morning began with the interns and students completing TPRs (temperature, pulse, respiration) and checks on the inpatients before presenting them at rounds. Not yet feeling part of the team, I was grateful to the intern who showed me the ropes and what paperwork to complete.



I was then assigned to my first task of the day – holding a horse for an MRI scan. This took much longer than I had anticipated, was more challenging than it sounds (as the patient insisted on moving at every crucial moment) and left me wondering quite why I'd been so keen on this placement. Fortunately, I then had the chance to observe my first equine general anaesthetic for a patient that was undergoing a joint flush by arthroscopy – which was fascinating. The procedure went well, the recovery was textbook, and I remembered why I'd wanted to do EMS in an equine hospital!

Day 3

My first turn to present at rounds, so I was nervous, but I managed to summarise the details of the case without tripping over my words too much. Despite being quite happy

to take histories and chat with clients, I realised that it's a different matter when your audience includes experts.

Another first was just around the corner as the previous day we'd split up the on-call rota, and tonight was my night. It turned out to be an amazing introduction to equine on call with the chance to watch a foaling, which I had never seen before, and the emergency arrival of a chest wound that thankfully was not as drastic as was anticipated. I even managed to get some sleep!

Day 5

In the morning I assisted in the dental suite, helping take radiographs and watching screws being removed from a horse's jaw after successful treatment for a mandibular fracture. This was especially interesting, as one of the reasons I'd wanted to do this placement was to see some vet-led equine dentistry.

There was a lull in activity after lunch, but I was soon to learn that there's no such thing as a free afternoon for a vet student; one of the clinical directors came into the staff room and asked another student and me if he could film us for a presentation he was doing about the future of the profession. This was a nerve-wracking experience, made worse by having to watch ourselves back afterwards – I'm not sure anyone likes the sound of their own recorded voice! However, it was interesting to hear other opin-

ions, and the topic was, of course, a very important and ever-pertinent issue.

Days 6 and 7

My first weekend on call. On the basis of safety in numbers, myself and the other student in the caravan decided to share the duties. I was called at midnight to help with the artificial insemination of a mare. Being the student on call means you are able to participate more, and I was given the opportunity to rectal the mare and feel the ovaries – another first for me.

The following night saw the arrival of a colic case, which was rushed immediately into surgery where strangulating lipomas were confirmed and removed. I was involved in preparing the patient and monitoring the anaesthetic while the other student scrubbed in.

Day 8

Tired after a weekend with limited sleep, but happy to have experienced my first surgical colic, I spent much of the day on the road with one of the clinical directors. This involved observing a range of first-opinion cases, including blood-sampling for suspected ragwort toxicity and a five-stage vetting.

Day 9

Another night on call, this one slightly more taxing than my previous experiences, as I had to get up every four hours to assist with passing a nasogastric tube in the aforementioned colic patient. The patient was refluxing but fortunately started to improve as the night progressed.

Day 10

A day of surgeries. I had observed a laryngeal paralysis diagnosis the day before and was able to follow the case to a standing laser Hobday operation. At this point of a busy day in theatre, I had already seen a castration under general anaesthesia and surgery for a kissing spine, so was interested to observe a

standing operation for comparison.

I was pleased that, at this stage of my placement, I was deemed to be trustworthy and was able to place a catheter under the watchful eye of one of the interns – so completing one of my preplacement learning objectives. In a busy hospital it can be easy to 'forget' the student, and I'm grateful that this wasn't the case throughout my placement where students were involved with practical skills from very early on.

Day 13

Another weekend on call – as the previous week's arrangement had worked so well, we students decided to do the same thing again, sharing the duties and chipping in to help each other.

A kick wound to the head came in as an emergency admission, and we were allowed to suture the wound under supervision. It was a relief the next day to see that when the bandages were changed our sutures were still in place and looking good!

Day 17

I experienced another first today when I spent the morning assisting in giving IPPV (intermittent positive pressure ventilation) to a horse that was having a sarcoid removed by laser therapy.

My task was made more challenging by the protective safety goggles I had to wear and the fact that I had a dead arm from my Covid vaccine the day before! However, I helped to keep the patient ventilated satisfactorily, and was able to assist with the recovery using head and tail ropes – something that is a lot harder than it looks and made me realise I may need to go to the gym more often...

Day 18

EMS students at the practice are asked to do a presentation for the vets. I'd rather hoped that this applied only to the vet school

students on rotation and that I had slipped through the net, but this wasn't the case. I was given the topic of arthrodesis, as I had seen a couple of cases during my time at the hospital. As with anything involving public speaking, I was nervous, and having put together a presentation at the end of the long days, was not altogether confident. However, it seemed to go down well and I was let off lightly with the questioning.

Day 19

My last day. We'd treated ourselves to a takeaway meal the night before to celebrate (and to save cooking). I was sad to be leaving, as I'd had the most amazing experience, made friends with the other students, and seen a variety of cases, as well as gaining a lot of hands-on experience.

Appropriately, having come to the practice to see some equine dentistry, I spent most of the day in the dental theatre, helping with packing removal, a sinus flush and an advanced dental.

All too soon, the time came for me to pack my bags, load my car, and say goodbye to everybody, promising that I would be back if I could. And, just like that, three weeks had flown by, creating memories I will treasure forever and a wealth of experience on which to build my professional future.

I would like to thank AVS and VDS Training for sponsoring the awards that made this EMS opportunity possible for me – thanks to their generosity, I was able to stay on site and experience being on call at the weekends, taking time off from the part-time job that usually funds my EMS.

Thanks too to the team at the practice, which tirelessly and patiently hosts a stream of students. And, finally, thanks to the students from the other vet school, who discovered a Glasgow student in their midst but survived to tell the tale!

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In Practice is produced in conjunction with **Vet Record**. The journal publishes peer-reviewed articles by experts in their field which cover all species, but principally farm, equine and companion animals, providing a regular update on clinical developments.

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Engaging with evidence-based veterinary medicine

Emily Medcalf

NOW in its third year, the *Veterinary Evidence* Student Awards continue to celebrate students' engagement with evidence-based veterinary medicine (EBVM) and its application in practice. The awards are run by RCVS Knowledge, and all entries are considered for publication in its peer-reviewed, open-access journal *Veterinary Evidence*.

This year, Alexandra Bartlett, from the Royal Veterinary College, took first prize for her Knowledge Summary exploring the evidence behind the use of NSAIDs for postoperative pain relief in castrated calves. Erina Leask, from the University of Sydney, came second with her paper exploring the use of EMLA cream to reduce pain associated with venepuncture in cats, while third place went to Eleanor Best, from the University of Bristol, who explored the evidence behind meloxicam dosage and administration for postoperative analgesia in rabbits.

Here they share their thoughts on the writing process, getting published and ultimately adding to the evidence base – something that they would encourage everyone in veterinary education and the professions to do.

What drew you to apply to the Veterinary Evidence Student Awards?

Alexandra During my intercalated year I became very interested in research. The opportunity to be published, even if I didn't win any of the prizes, was very appealing to me. I also really liked the idea of being able to add to the evidence base and potentially help improve the standard of care for our patients.

Erina I had planned from the beginning to pursue publication with *Veterinary Evidence*, and the compe-



Award winners 2021: (from left) Alexandra Bartlett, Erina Leask and Eleanor Best

tition entry dates just happened to line up perfectly with my timeline. My primary aim, though, was just to achieve publication – this outcome caught me quite by surprise!

Eleanor Over the lockdown period, I really wanted to try to gain some more research experience and contribute to the knowledge base in some way. I remembered having a go at writing a Knowledge Summary in my fourth year at university, and so thought that this would be a great way to do both.

What made you want to appraise the evidence around your chosen topic?

Alexandra I have always had a strong interest in farm practice and specifically the unique position of veterinary professionals to help improve farm animal welfare. Castration is an incredibly common procedure on farms, and I was aware that many calves are castrated without pain relief. Local anaesthesia is not always practical for farmers to use so I wanted to see if there was any evidence that non-steroidal anti-inflammatories alone could reduce pain and therefore improve welfare, as they can be given at the time of castration so may be easier to use.

Erina I am passionate about feline welfare in veterinary settings. I'm sure we can all appreciate that distressed cats have the potential to become extremely difficult patients very rapidly. Yet, these cats deserve veterinary care no less than other patients, and as veterinary professionals, we owe it to them to play our part in mitigating the development of fear and aggression.

It surprised me to find that while many clinicians had heard of EMLA cream, or even used it themselves, very few of them chose to use it prophylactically. My goal for analysing and presenting the evidence around the efficacy of EMLA cream was to hopefully encourage more veterinarians to make it part of their normal hospital protocol, particularly for non-emergency in-patients.

Eleanor I noticed on EMS that there were many ways that practices managed pain relief in small mammals. Rabbits are very difficult to pain score, so I thought it would be interesting to look into how we can best manage their postoperative pain in practice. I hope that my paper will offer more insight into how we can manage pain relief in rabbits in general practice, as well as providing a good basis on which to undertake future research into this topic. ►

What was the writing and publication process like?

Alexandra There were a lot of different findings to unpick and try to draw together to form a conclusion, and I found that process very rewarding – it's exciting to know that other veterinary professionals might use my work to inform their future practice.

The most challenging part of the process was probably trying to figure out the best way to fairly compare the studies I appraised, as pain is very subjective, and each study investigated different indicators of pain across different time scales.

Erina This was my first attempt at publication, so the entire peer-reviewing process was brand new territory for me. I enjoyed the review process the most. It was so encouraging to get feedback from such highly regarded peers, and it allowed me to read my own work with fresh eyes again.

Eleanor I did not expect to find such little evidence on the use of twice-daily meloxicam for postoperative pain relief in rabbits. The most challenging part of the process was sorting through all the available literature and deciding which papers to exclude and which to include. I found that by setting myself very specific exclusion criteria, I was able to manage this much better, but I did still find the volume of available literature a little overwhelming!

Was writing for a journal as you anticipated?

Alexandra This was my first time writing for a journal and it was easier than I anticipated. There were lots of resources to help me understand the process of EBVM and how to critically appraise studies, which was helpful as that wasn't something I had covered in much detail in my university course at that point. The editorial and library teams were also supportive and answered my (many!) questions very quickly.

Erina Overall, the experience was more straightforward than I had

anticipated. The templates offered by *Veterinary Evidence* provided very clear instructions and examples, as well as a neat and tidy structure for my writing.

Eleanor I really enjoyed the experience and learnt a great deal about how to format and set out a paper. The whole submission process was very easy and there was always someone to ask for help if I needed it.

What will you take away from the process?

Alexandra I learnt a lot about the process of EBVM. We've since had an EBVM lecture series as part of my course and having already written my article for *Veterinary Evidence*, I felt like I had a much more solid grasp of the basic principles and how to carry out a literature search and appraise evidence, which made those lectures easier to follow. I think that EBVM is such an important skill for veterinary professionals to have, so I'm glad I could start practising this skill early in my career.

It was also a great opportunity to give something back to the profession by adding to the evidence base, which I think is very important in continuing to maintain high standards of care.

Erina My greatest gain from the experience was the time spent honing and challenging my critical analysis skills. Learning how to better find and critically appraise original research will be an extremely valuable tool in practice, one that I hope will allow me to make better clinical decisions for my patients based on the best evidence available. In addition, the process has given me a pro-

found appreciation for Knowledge Summaries, which bring all the evidence into one location and do a lot of the hard work for you.

Eleanor I found the process to be really valuable, especially as a veterinary student. I now feel much more comfortable navigating my way around literature databases and deciding which articles to trust.

What would you say to other people who are interested in taking part in the competition next year?

Alexandra I'd tell anybody who's interested to write a Knowledge Summary or take part in the competition. It's such a valuable learning experience and a great opportunity to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, especially as a student.

Erina Not only is the experience so valuable for your own personal growth, but you get to contribute to the evidence base at the same time. It is daunting, and a lot of work, but you can approach it at your own pace. In addition, the *Veterinary Evidence* team are extremely helpful and have lots of resources for guiding you through each step of the process. They even have a list of clinical questions that real clinicians would like answers to, if you're not sure where to start.

Eleanor It is such a great opportunity to get involved in research and potentially get your paper published as an undergraduate. Knowledge Summaries are really helpful for clinicians, and they are also a good way of exploring a topic that you are interested in in more detail. I would really encourage other students to get involved.

The 2022 competition

Enhance your academic and research skills by writing a Knowledge Summary and submitting it to *Veterinary Evidence*, the open-access, peer-reviewed journal of RCVS Knowledge, the charity partner of the RCVS. Also, be in with a chance to win one of three cash prizes. The 2022 competition is now open and the deadline for submissions is 14 January 2022. You can find more information at <https://knowledge.rcvs.org.uk/grants/available-grants/veterinary-evidence-student-awards/>

We all make mistakes...

Elizabeth Stephenson (JAVS Editor)

EVERYONE makes mistakes, and vet students are no different in this regard. Often, though, this isn't talked about that much at university. If we can encourage people to be more open and treat their inevitable mistakes as learning opportunities then we'll all be better off. So, here is a collection of snippets about mistakes that have been submitted by different vet students.

Examples of mistakes and the responses to them

I was on my lambing placement and was tending to the pregnant ewes on my own. One of them was struggling with a breach birth so I called the farmer in to help. He told me to pull as quickly and forcefully as I could. With all the membranes and fluids, my grip kept slipping and I struggled to get the lamb out. When it was out I acted hastily and swung it before I had cleared the airways. The farmer told me to stop and so we then cleared the airways. By the time we had done all of this the lamb had died.

I was quite upset as I blamed myself for the mistake. The farmer was lovely and told me the correct order to do things and why, so I could do the right thing next time. He explained that it wasn't my fault but that I should learn for the next one, so this is what I tried to focus on. I definitely learnt that in time-sensitive situations you may want to rush in with action but it's sometimes best to take the time to think about what you're doing first.

I was on my first EMS placement, when the vet asked if I wanted to stitch up. I thought she was joking so I said no. I'd never done any surgery and didn't have confidence in myself. I then went to get something for her and came back to find the student nurse being taught how to suture.

Turns out the vet was being serious and I had missed out on my first chance at surgery.

I explained to her that I thought she was joking and that I'd love to do surgery next time there was an opportunity so that she didn't think I didn't want to do surgery.

The lesson here is to back yourself if given the opportunity to learn.

I had an accident with a lamb on my lambing placement which resulted in the upsetting death of the lamb. I immediately told the people who I was working with and was honest about my mistake. I think this made me realise that no matter what you should always be truthful, as most people will appreciate this and it will often result in a better outcome than if you were to lie and not take responsibility for your actions.

I drew up a cat's preanaesthetic protocol for a dog, and gave it to the poor thing. He didn't have a very smooth anaesthetic needless to say. I told the vet straight away when I noticed my mistake. We simply placed an IV catheter immediately and induced.

Mistakes happen, just ensure you communicate any mistakes that you may have made and if they could be dangerous, ensure to communicate with urgency!

General thoughts on mistakes

Make sure you write them down afterwards along with other interesting things you've seen/done that day. That way hopefully you don't do it again.

When we look back at things we always remember the things we did wrong or times we embarrassed ourselves most clearly, so it clouds how we think the place-

ment actually went. We look back and think 'All I did was screw up and get things wrong, the vet must think I am such a moron.' But we forget that (despite trying to pull that one lamb that you thought wasn't that big but actually is too big to pull out and is now stuck) there are also 200 other lambs bouncing around or 20 puppies with full immunity to deadly diseases because of you. Remember to think about the big picture, not the zoomed-in black smudge.

Being honest with the vet you are working with or with your supervisor is the most important thing. Of course we are going to feel an element of guilt in most cases, but part of the process of vet school is learning to rationalise these situations to ourselves and how to move on.

Talk about it with your friends, seek comfort in knowing we are human and don't stew over the situation by yourself. More than likely if you chat about it to a close friend, they'll probably tell you they've had a similar situation before.

And a couple of amusing ones...

I once broke both my elbows tripping over a goat.

I tried to milk a bull on AHMS.

In conclusion

Progressing to a culture where we feel comfortable to talk about our mistakes will both improve the wellbeing of students and in the long term increase the safety of our clinical practice. Nights spent tossing in bed thinking about the mistake you made on EMS that day will leave you tired and unlikely to continue learning well. Ring a friend, be open, have a chat, commiserate, learn and crack on.

Time to talk about failure

Jen Daw (Cambridge Senior Rep)

'WE are each our own worst critic.' We've heard that line a million times before, but why is it we rarely give ourselves a break? Indeed, those in the veterinary profession are overly prone to such self-criticism, exacerbating the stigma of failure and fueling the fear of being 'struck off' at any moment. In a profession where the stakes are high, perfectionism is rife and although it is probably one of the reasons for our entrance to the job, it is also one of vets' biggest downfalls.

To combat shared fears and anxieties, each year AVS presents 'CV of Failures' events at vet schools across the country. Experienced vets share events from their careers when things did not go to plan and offer advice on how to respond in such circumstances. This year, Cambridge was joined by equine clinician and infectious disease expert – and self-confessed perfectionist – Professor Josh Slater.



Professor Josh Slater discussed imposter syndrome and perfectionism during a 'CV of Failures' presentation at Cambridge

Graduating in 1985 from the University of Edinburgh, Josh has since worked in private equine practice and completed a PhD in equine infectious diseases at the University of Cambridge. He has held several biosecurity roles at international equestrian events, including the 2008 Beijing and 2012 London Olympics, as well as the World Equestrian

Games in 2018. Having lectured at the RVC and Cambridge, Josh supervised preclinical anatomy at Girton College, usually on Saturdays at 9 am – not the best friend to my undergrad-hungover-self.

Diving further into Josh's CV, several presidencies stand out. He is a past president of not only the British Equine Veterinary Association, but also the European College of Equine Internal Medicine and the Federation of European Equine Veterinary Associations. Currently, Josh is head of the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences at Melbourne vet school.

With such an impressive CV, there appears to be little room for failure. However, along with an attempt to spay a tom cat, Josh described the all-too-familiar feelings of imposter syndrome, perfectionism and the omnipresent fear of being 'rumbled' at any moment.

Be more rhino!

Imogen Serjeant (Nottingham Senior Rep)

During Vet Student Wellbeing Week (VSWW) back in February, we were kindly joined by Colin Whiting, the VetFess and VetWings sensation, for an AVS CV of Failures special. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, an in-person meeting wasn't possible, so Colin joined us on Zoom.

Colin is an advanced practitioner in small animal surgery based in Cornwall and during his talk he took us on a journey through his career and the obstacles he has faced in the process. At one point, he described himself as a rhino who on being knocked down would get up and 'charge' back at the thing he did not achieve at the first attempt. I think we could all benefit from being a bit more 'rhino'.

Among all the many interesting stories that Colin told us, there were two that stuck out for me. One was during his undergraduate studies at Liverpool and the other was during his career as a practising vet.

In his final year, Colin was asked by his friend, 'What are you going to do when they put the finals results up and you've failed?' He seemed to be implying that Colin was perhaps one of the students more likely to fail after previous exam failures in earlier years. Despite struggling with any form of examination, Colin told us that this would never stop him getting to his goal of being a vet. I found this a very heart-warming insight into how you do not need to be top of the class in everything to achieve

your goal and that even with examination failures you can 'rhino' yourself out of it and come charging back.

The second story concerned a bitch spay in Colin's first few years of practice when things didn't go exactly as planned. The dog was bleeding internally and needed to be opened up again. The surgeon who reopened the dog found a blood-soaked swab still inside and bleeding that would not stop. This story reminded us that it is possible to 'fail' even on simple procedures and that mistakes can be resolved.

Colin told us that this event really shook him, but that he felt supported by his boss and team and thus his confidence was not completely knocked. He went on to tell us that he did every CPD course possible after this!

Overall, it was a brilliant talk to round off a fantastic week promoting mental wellbeing for veterinary students in the UK. Thank you to Colin and the VSWW team!



Colin Whiting spoke at Nottingham's 'CV of Failures' event, describing some of the obstacles he has faced during his career

'Perfectionism is our first failure,' he said; 'Our first failure is failing to realise that we are perfectionists.'

Vet students are inherently high achievers and it is perfectionism that fuels our clinical aspiration, but perfection cannot always be achieved. Evidently, being a perfectionist is not only an obvious answer to the interview question, 'What's your biggest weakness?' but also a real struggle for many. Particularly at vet school when, after leaving school, the high-achieving individual becomes the norm, our mistakes are blown out of proportion, and self-criticism is heightened. Comparison of grades, EMS placements, and overall 'keenness' for our degree is constant – whether verbalised or confined to internal thoughts. This 'pressure cooker effect' creates a suitable environment for imposter syndrome, a feeling of being a fraud and somehow getting away with it.

Speaking from experience, Josh explained the recognisable feeling of achievement accomplished purely by luck. He joked that part of his residency success at Cambridge was because 'no one else was available'. Similar notions of luck echoed

throughout his talk, as he took us through his career trajectory – 'Who knows how I did, but somehow I secured a job at a mixed practice after graduating,' he said and even now, he jokes how he is yet to be 'found out' as he enters his 37th year in the job.

Josh's talk later considered how to tackle our negative and fraudulent feelings. In particular, he is keen for further discussion throughout the profession of how to address common feelings of phoniness and failure. He noted that attitudes have changed greatly over the years, recalling a lameness case he referred to a specialist earlier on in his career, a step that, at the time, was seen as a failure.

More work is also needed to verbalise and air out our moth-eaten thoughts of 'I don't know how I got here, I really slipped through the net.' Josh urged us to acknowledge our success and recognise our skills, and help colleagues do the same. Similarly, we need to talk about the times we accidentally tried to spay a tom cat, or tried to lamb a postpartum ewe on EMS (I won't mention

names!). We hold ourselves and our work to a high standard in the vet world and rightly so. We aspire to provide our best work for patients and clients, but we shouldn't sweat the small and common mistakes that come with learning – and this is lifelong!

As Hannah Montana once said: 'Everybody makes mistakes, everybody has those days.' Mistakes and mishaps are a daily occurrence in life – so let's talk about them. Although we may omit our failures from job applications, every professional has an unwritten 'mistakes' section under the work experience and education headings of their CV. Furthermore, let's recognise our failure to give ourselves a break, and focus our perfectionism on providing high standards of care. Recognition of harsh self-criticism is clearly not something learnt overnight, but a lifelong constructive process. However, with greater acknowledgement and awareness of the mental wellbeing of veterinary professionals, perhaps the stigma of failure can be lessened as a new generation of vets format their CVs.

Being a vet student with ADHD

Tom Gillespie (Nottingham Senior Rep)

HELLO, I'm Tom, and for about six years of my life, I've known I have attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). I've probably had it longer than I think that's how it works.

To be honest, the clues appeared early during primary school, from sprinting in circles around my house with lunch in hand, to being as hard to find as the neurovascular bundle on horse feet (there's my quota of vet school jokes met!). In the interests of fairness, there are no detectives in the Gillespie household – one of my older brothers was diagnosed with ADHD at the same time, making the third brother the psychological deviant.



When I arrived in secondary school, I launched into academics like a feather at a dart board – no matter how much energy I threw at something, I always seemed to fly off in another direction by no fault of my own. Several other directions sometimes. SATS came and to my complete surprise, I scored below expected. I honestly thought I had been working hard for them – and I had, just not in quite the right way.

Fast forward a little and I'm sat in a nicely lit room, across from an equally nice psychiatrist, who glanced at my near constant 'chair dancing' and said 'I think we could pursue an ADHD diagnosis.'

Shut the front door! My mind was blown. (Looking back, as I write this with both legs flying around under my desk, it might have been an easy spot...)

Once we'd figured out the right daily amount of atomoxetine to keep me controlled without stifling my energetic disposition, I managed to do pretty well in my GCSEs. I maintained the strategies and methods that I'd acquired through to my A-levels, also netting some grades I was surprised and happy with. Then came my ambition, my goal in all this: veterinary education.

I was part of the first April-intake cohort at Nottingham. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions meant I began vet school in the confines of my own room. All day.

As you can imagine, for someone of my mental faculties, this was a challenge. But this was new, this was exciting, this is what I had strived for, so I applied myself. I dug in, made peace with my stress balls, and attacked learning in a way I hadn't before. The great breadth and wealth of information sent my way, considered by some a challenge, actually helped me, as I have always found that covering many things in rapid succession helps a great deal with my focus. I humbly thank my family for helping me through this long period of being stationary.

Then, finally, came moving-in day and the resumption of in-person practical teaching, an exhilarating, scintillating prospect indeed, and much of the reason I gravitated to veterinary medicine. I enjoy getting hands-on and seeing the oddities of evolution up close and investigating all the avenues this profession has to offer. Nothing quite compares.

All this was quickly followed by the first formative exam, and picture my joy when I see the exam structure. Short answers and multiple choice? No two-and-a-half-hour exams? Colour pictures with drag and drop? I could quote Gordon Ramsay liking food for once! These exams weren't just a breath of fresh air, but also a joy compared to what I had done before and gave me a



distinct positive attitude about my prospects in this degree.

However, the arrival of exams also brought another sudden realisation. I could not revise as I had before. No longer could I pace in circles as my family quizzed me with flash cards. No longer could I practise exam technique on past and sample papers, or utilise my previous unique exam arrangements (I was able to pause the clock and step away from my exam when I felt I needed to, and was given a separate room to myself – the latter was probably due to other students getting fed up with my constant vibrating on squeaky chairs during exams; lizzy, I do apologise).

So came the adaptations and overhauls. Well into my second year now, I use Quizlet instead, an artificial voice to replace my family's. I stopped bothering with scribbled notes and now go straight to making revision materials – too much sitting still was required for things I wouldn't use again. I now live for practical teaching, where all the jumbled theory and lectures come together in a series of eclectic light bulb moments. I sometimes listen to lectures while skipping, or if they're prerecorded, on 1.5x speed. I also cannot apply myself to any degree of academic teaching if I have not exercised that day, struggling to even stay in the chair, let alone listen to a 45-minute lecture. Daily exercise

through any means is what gets me by in many ways. I began to pick up hobbies I'd left by the wayside before, music and art primarily. I have always found keeping my mind active and engaged in many things is the best way to placate it.

I suppose the point of all this is partly to recount my experiences and challenges as a fledgling veterinary student, but also to say everyone learns in their own way. Whether you have the same four letters tacked on that I do, something totally different, or nothing diagnosable at all, it doesn't really matter. You learn at your pace, struggle and cope at your pace, and succeed at your pace and in your own way, entirely un beholden to anyone but yourself. Our minds are, as many things with humans are, utterly, wonderfully, horrifyingly, beautifully unique.

And who'd want to change that?

Coming to vet school has not only rekindled my love for many things, writing included, but has given me the chance to meet more unique minds than I ever have before. I see all sorts of strange and endearing personalities every day and there are few things in life that I enjoy more. I think we could all stand to be a bit weirder.

If you'd like to speak to me about my ADHD or yours, or even anything else at all really, I'd love nothing more.

Thank you for your time.

We need more teaching on sustainability in the curriculum

Seth Kennard (JAVS Editor, 2017–2019)

THE climate crisis has started and is already a global health emergency. The indisputable fact that changing climatic conditions and environmental degradation will have severe and unequal effect on food security for many of the world's poorest citizens inherently makes the climate crisis a global health crisis.¹

It cannot be denied that ruminant animal production is a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions,² but it is not just farm vets on the hook: on a local scale, contamination of watercourses by parasite treatments for pets³ should concern anyone who relies on insects to maintain a healthy and viable ecosystem – in other words, all of us.

In future, key performance indicators for both production and companion animals will include not just welfare and profitability, but also sustainability.

It is a shame, therefore, that those in charge of curriculums at our vet schools are failing to take the lead. Debate and discussion surrounding environmental impact seem rare, fleeting and barely scratch the surface. Often, group-think seems to cloud conversations, with too much talk focused on the need for efficiency and refinement rather than honest conversations about the polluting and loss-making practices currently in use by many food-producing enterprises in the UK.⁴

While it is good to see the topic is now becoming more mainstream, with this year's London Vet Show featuring several talks around the theme⁵ and the new Harper Keele vet school listing sustainable livestock health and welfare as a key strategic learning objective,⁶ the veterinary sector is still behind in the conversation compared to those in the medical and humanitarian sectors.⁷



Students for Global Health⁸ has recently been asking its members to critique and grade medical schools for their approaches to sustainability both directly (such as the action taken by universities in Berlin to drastically reduce their meat offerings in canteens⁹) and indirectly through changes to the curriculum. The University of Southampton, for instance, to avoid adding to the already packed workload for students has introduced 'infused teaching' that 'gently and continually reinforce[s] the importance of climate change and sustainability in relation to health in a wide variety of contexts'.¹⁰

University education should be equipping vet students with the tools and mindsets needed to change the world. This should not just be to ensure a safe future for the health and welfare of animals committed to our care but also for the public good. Some industries through their past actions have made it clear they value profit and maintaining the sta-

tus quo more than sustainability and global health. We as an ethical and critically thinking profession should make it clear we are not like that. To that end, more debate, discussion and teaching of sustainable practices and a thorough self-examination of current taught techniques should be rapidly implemented at UK vet schools. This should not wait until it is time to update the syllabus or until new teaching staff are recruited – it is time to change now.

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■ The 'Opinion and Debate' section in JAVS is a place to share your thoughts on issues of interest. The opinions expressed by individual students may not reflect the official position of AVS or BVA.

How Covid has changed farm EMS

Piers Seal (Sixth year, Cambridge)

FROM frantically searching up and down the house for your boots that you pray haven't been left at uni, to triple checking you've put the right postcode into Google Maps, the night before setting off on farm clinical EMS has its fair share of drama. I was excited but nervous for my first week seeing farm animal practice, and, with the added expectations that come with being a final-year student, I hoped I wouldn't feel too out of my comfort zone. Coming from a city background, my hoofed animal sightings had been few and far between, and patients tended to need a lead in a hand rather than a rope and a crush to keep them from running away from clinical examination.

I was also apprehensive about how different my experience of the profession would be compared to EMS in small animal practices. Speaking to non-vetty friends at home provided the rather crude answer of 'It's just putting your hand up cows isn't it?' To which my reply would be 'Actually we often go beyond the elbow...' Yet another reason why vets are great at dinner parties!

Once I had arrived at the practice, I was pleasantly surprised at how welcoming the vet and clients were to a city boy who has seen more cockerpoos than cows. The first few days were a steep learning curve trying to switch my mindset from a small animal perspective to patients much larger than myself. It was clear that no amount of lockdown living room workouts would ever prepare me to restrain a cow without a crush.

Thankfully, as the days went on I began to see the benefits of working in the large animal sector: being outdoors, getting to know farmers and gaining lots of practical experience – something that is so important for our development as future vets.



However, some aspects of farm EMS seemed different compared to what other students had told me about their experiences in previous years. New measures had been put in place as a response to the global Covid-19 pandemic. While necessary, I feel that these changes to the way EMS is run could lead to a potential loss of key experiences and knowledge gained by students, which could affect their ability to perform in this sector in the early years of their veterinary career.

Here are a few things I noticed about the differences in approach to large animal EMS compared to small animal, especially with the pandemic making all placements markedly different from previous student experiences.

To begin with, even before slipping into your best overalls and baggy waterproofs, the task of finding available EMS has been challenging for many vet students amid the numerous lockdowns and restrictions. Placements that were booked months to years in advance were cancelled at short notice, making rebooking during the now free weeks difficult. A limited number of local practices for city students, as well as many practices having EMS commitments with specific universities, made finding an available

practice even harder, with students travelling far and having to fund accommodation for placements.

These issues were not the fault of the practices themselves as they had to align with government guidelines to keep their staff and clients as safe as possible during these challenging times. Hopefully, with restrictions easing, more practices will be able to take on students to help improve their farm medicine skills.

When starting my farm placement, the biggest culture shock I found coming from small animal practice was the concept of driving to the clients' place of residence rather than them coming to the practice with their animal. This means that the number of clients seen each day is far fewer than in small animal practice.

This approach led to longer and more in-depth consults between the farmers and the vet, a dynamic I appreciated as it felt much more personal, compared with the standard 15-minute dog vaccine consult. However, social distancing rules have led to many practices only allowing EMS students if they are able to drive to the farms separately in their own vehicles. On the plus side, this means EMS is possible during Covid times, but unfortunately also leads to accessibility issues as students who do not own a car are unable to complete the necessary weeks needed for large animal practice.

Furthermore, valuable time that used to be spent discussing cases with the vets in their car in between consults is lost, which means there is less time for students to prep for each consult and fewer opportunities to ask questions to the vet away from the clients.

Travelling to clients in my own car also introduced the challenge of trying to find farms down narrow winding roads and postcodes that led to the middle of a pond in a field rather than the actual place of

residence (city living has got me too comfortable it seems). So, unless you drive like Mad Max, there's a risk that you'll completely miss the exciting last-minute vet call-outs just by taking one wrong turn on the way. I missed seeing a C-section because the satnav decided to take me to a church instead of the farm (maybe it was a sign, who knows?).

Moreover, I'd hate to be the mechanic who checks over my little Corsa during its MOT after a few weeks of country lane and off-road driving!

These problems were not encountered during my time at small animal practices, and it's something that both vets and students alike consider to be big issues with Covid EMS placements.

The pandemic has, on the other hand, created a surprisingly positive outcome from the perspective of the farm vets themselves. Some vet schools have scrapped the species minima requirement for clinical EMS as a result of the limited number of weeks in which to complete place-



Sheep are not woolly dogs! Switching from a small animal to a large animal perspective was a steep learning curve

ments. This means that students who now attend farm practice EMS are more likely to be those who are genuinely interested in the field rather than just filling a quota. More enthusiastic participation on placements makes the experience more enjoyable for both the students and the vets they are shadowing.

The changes that Covid and the numerous lockdowns have necessitated are affecting both students and vets alike. It is completely

understandable why these changes to EMS have been put in place by farm practices, as they want to have students while also keeping in line with government guidelines. I am aiming to enter mixed practice after graduation, and with the prospect of job hunting on the horizon, I hope practices will be understanding that students and new grads will have had a very different EMS experience during the pandemic compared to previous years.

BOOK REVIEW

A comprehensive physiology bible

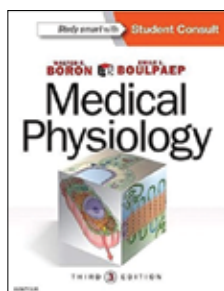
Medical Physiology, 3rd edn

WF Boron, EL Boulpaep
Hardback, 1312 pages
Elsevier Publications, 2016
£54.99

Reviewed by Ollie Bardsley

Why am I reviewing a human physiology textbook in a veterinary journal? Physiology is the study of 'how things work' in complex organisms – and as any veterinary student or veterinarian will know, is not limited to human beings. A detailed understanding of the workings of the body is equally important to the practising doctor as it is to the practising vet and impacts on our clinical decision-making both consciously and unconsciously. For the past three years I've been studying physiology, and my detailed understanding of the science would be much poorer without a copy of this textbook on my bookshelf – and often next to me on my desk.

Boron & Boulpaep's Medical Physiology is a large book laden with text – but I don't believe that reading the



text is always important. What makes this book special is the diagrams. I can confidently say that this textbook includes the most simple, clear and memorable diagrams of any textbook I have used during my studies. Often, I go searching through this book looking for a diagram for a process I'm trying to understand – be that pathogenesis of circus arrhythmias (p 504) or how salt balance is controlled (p 840). Medical Physiology has always delivered.

Another amazing bonus of this book is its scope. Often, for instance, I've been unable to find cellular content in cell biology textbooks and have actually found it in this book. The book begins from an A-level biology level but scales up slowly to advanced clinical physiology which is highly applicable to veterinary study.

Overall, I'd recommend this book to any vet student studying elements of physiology in their course. I've found Medical Physiology helpful during my intercalated research year and to gain some further insight into content I've studied in my anatomy, reproduction and animal management classes as well. I should also add that editions 1 and 2 are both much cheaper, available online both new and used for under £10, and contain just as detailed diagrams as you'll find in the third edition.

Interprofessionalism: key to successful teamwork in practice

Remi Onabolu and Kathryn Owen (RVC Vet + Nurse Interprofessional Society committee members)

TEAMWORK. It's probably a buzzword that you've plastered all over your personal statement or continuously repeated during your vet school interview. But perhaps there is a better word to use when referring to learning about collaboration between the veterinary team. If you've heard the term 'interprofessional education' before, then great! Half of our job is already done. If not, then do not worry. You've got the rest of your career to embrace it.

Interprofessional education is all about getting students from different health professions to learn about, from and with each other to improve patient and client care. As Ruth Serlin, who is part of the interprofessional education team at the RVC, states, 'amazing things happen when we recognise the value of interprofessional teams'. Just ask yourself, how comprehensive is your understanding of the roles and responsibilities of every staff member in practice?

Some universities offer veterinary nursing as well as the veterinary medicine course, but due to how these different courses are taught, we may not get the chance to meet each other until we bump into one another on a placement. Ultimately, we'll end up working together, so why not start from day 1?

Interprofessionalism is all about understanding each other so that we can create a better working environment. By understanding what nurses can do under Schedule 3, we can carefully delegate some tasks to vet nurses, which can allow the rest of the team to focus on other cases. This could be the key to improving satisfaction for all veterinary professionals.

Students at the RVC (supported by both vet and vet nursing lecturers) established the Vet + Nurse



Interprofessional Society in 2018 to give vet and vet nursing students the chance to interact with each other. The society hosts fun and free events for students focusing on themes that both professions face. Previous events have opened up discussions on pet obesity, parasitology and euthanasia. The group has also run interactive workshops addressing anaesthesia, suturing and dentistry.

Earlier this year, we ran an online symposium which attracted vet and vet nursing students from all over the world. Speakers loved the chance to interact with students and share their specialist knowledge. There was also an inspiring panel discussion with Jenny Reason (MRCVS) and Helen Manning (RVN) who had each set up their own practice, as well as a social event.

So what's the future of interprofessional education? Well, the Vet + Nurse Interprofessional Society hopes to inspire other universities to create their own version of the club. This can be in the vet schools that teach veterinary nursing but also in the vet schools that have a nearby

veterinary nursing college. The RVC society will be running a series of online talks throughout the autumn term that will be open to vet and vet nurse students from all UK institutions and will cover a range of topics, including arthritis management and wildlife casualties, with emphasis on the specific skills both vets and nurses can bring to the team in these scenarios. We also hope to hold another symposium in the future, hopefully in person (Covid-willing), to allow student vet and vet nurses to network with each other.

If you are interested in joining our online talks and perhaps starting your own club then please do email us or follow us on Instagram (rvc_ipec) as we are happy to support you in becoming a member of our extended interprofessional family. Additionally, if you are a company that would like to get involved and support us, then feel free to get in touch for a chat.

Interested in developing a forward-thinking and collaborative profession? (You should be, we're the future after all.) Drop us an email at: suiprec@rvc.ac.uk

Deflecting Covid curveballs and cracking on

Maddy Shorthouse (Second year, Harper Keele)

HELLO! My name is Maddy and I've just finished my first year at the very new and shiny Harper Keele vet school. I started uni fresh from A-levels (or rather centre-assessed grades!) during possibly the weirdest year many of us have ever experienced, and was straight into another exciting – albeit also weird – situation of being part of the pioneer cohort at HK.

While the country was adjusting to constantly changing restrictions, and the whole world was rocked by coronavirus, I had my own challenges...like trying to figure out the washing machine, finding the work:pub balance, and thinking about how to budget for the first time. Watching friends figure these things out too at the same time was equally amusing – WHO KNEW pasta grew when you added water [eye roll]!

Joking aside, I think most people would agree that 2020 was not a good year for most things. However, HK did an excellent job of mitigating all the obstacles presented by the pandemic; we were able to continue pretty much as normal, and significant effort was made to keep us in practical teaching sessions, whether in the labs at Keele or on the farm at Harper.

Towards the end of the academic year and after a long time coming, we were able to visit the brand-new Harper Veterinary Education Centre, which was later officially opened by HRH the Princess Royal. It felt like such a pivotal moment and the excitement in the room was truly palpable for the first time.

This year, despite some difficulty in meeting between campuses in person (grrr...restrictions) we have definitely got to know one another, particularly at our home site.



We have had regular face-to-face small-group teaching sessions with clinical teaching fellows with whom we have built excellent relationships throughout the year. Many of the cohort have undertaken a number of placements with great success – not forgetting to add Covid to the risk assessment – spreading far and wide, and putting HK on the map.

I'm based at Keele and therefore can't fully comment on the situation at Harper; however, from my perspective, the teaching has been reasonably smooth throughout my first year, with only minor hiccups – like when several of us tested positive for Covid and halted in-person teaching for two weeks. (I'm pleased to say that community spirit prevailed during our period of forced isolation and we were still friends at the end.)

It was always intended that tech would play a big part in our teaching, with lectures live-streamed across both campuses simultaneously, so we all received the same information at the same time – arguably, therefore, HK was reason-

ably well equipped to deal with such a streaming-heavy year (thank you Teams!).

We also made the best of the tech-based year from a social perspective, holding quizzes and socials between both campuses, as well as a collaboration with the RVC. We are hoping, of course, that these can take place in person in the next academic year, and everyone is buzzing for Sports Weekend whenever it is safe to resume.

Our Vet Soc is also finally getting off the ground, ready for the new intake of 2021 freshers and plenty of fun socials, and events are in the works, along with our newly set traditions, including boiler suit night at the SU (wellies compulsory, in true vet student style).

Starting a new vet school comes with its own set of challenges of course, even without a pandemic throwing all sorts of curveballs into the mix. All-in-all, however, I feel 2020/21 was a triumph. Though it is hard to imagine a return to 'normal' anytime soon, the prospect of sitting in a lecture theatre/clinical skills lab as a vet student, in a very new vet building, in the near future is so exciting!

I'm sure future HK goings on will be well documented on social media alongside the more polished updates available on the website, but for now, that's hopefully the last time a vet school will have to open under such strange conditions.

2020/21 was an absolute roller coaster of a year for each and every student across all universities and courses. Just making it through, learning to adapt to new situations and staying on top of everything is a huge achievement, so if you're reading this, good job!

Clinical EMS in Ireland during the Covid-19 pandemic

Claire O'Leary (Dublin Senior Rep 2020)

EIGHTEEN months ago, at the very beginning of the pandemic and only a week after completing my 'half-way ceremony' (basically an excuse to dress up, but nevertheless such a lovely occasion), in my local vets in the west of Ireland we got word that Covid-19 was causing a stir.

This was the start of it all: two days before St Patrick's Day, the parades were cancelled, pubs were shut, people panicked and cleared the shops of toilet paper. It was amusing and worrying at the same time.

There was no understanding of what was happening, and everyone assumed the world was shutting down for two weeks, and then it would all be over. 'Hold fast,' people were thinking, 'buckle down for two weeks and that'll be the last of it.' Little did we know. There was such a bread shortage that you would've sold your mother for a pan of Brennans bread at this point!

The veterinary world, however, did not stop. At my local practice, I was completing two weeks of clinical EMS. Hardly anything changed; we still got in at 8 every morning and left at whatever time the work was completed. It was springtime, manic as always, and we were inundated with people worried about their animals. I remember one day, after coming out of the small animal area, I stepped outside to be greeted by eight trailers of lambing ewes, including three ewes in need of a C-section. The vets were outside, facemasks on, gloves on – the works – trying to get through this mountain of work.

It was great, so much experience

“You are many things more than a vet when you're out in the field”

gained from what appeared to be the busiest spring yet. It could have been something to do with the fact that owners were spending more time at home with their animals and so were noticing more and more illnesses, or it could've simply been one of those springs. Either way, we travelled high on the whole of the west coast of Ireland, and the islands, trying to get to all of the patients.

The large animal vets were here, there and everywhere, on the road, in the clinic, in the factories, etc. To everyone else the world had come to a standstill, but for all the practice's vets, life carried on as normal – if not slightly busier even!

Many people did not adhere to the social distancing guidelines introduced during those first few weeks, putting us at risk. Social etiquette had not been established when it came to asking people to take a step back, or to wear a mask. Oftentimes it was just the vets who wore masks, the clients having failed to bring some along, given that there was also a face mask shortage in the country (as if not having toilet roll and bread wasn't bad enough!).

PPE was also in crisis. Hospitals didn't have enough gloves, hairnets, syringes – you name it, they didn't have it. This meant that many of

the local veterinary practices were asked to donate (what little) they had to the hospitals. It was genuinely admirable how much the vets were willing to donate. Many did this silently, without any recognition of their actions, taking the financial loss on the chin. It was great to see the community spirit.

Trips to the local islands were the highlight of this time. As an example of the tight-knit community that developed, before we visited an island, we would pick up some groceries for the islanders, who then collected us by boat to bring us to their herd for its herd test. During these trips I learnt that if you ever go on a boat with a mask on, make sure it's on tight or it will end up sailing away!

Working in the west of Ireland you can see how much influence and support the local vets give to farmers. Often, vets are the only people some farmers may see from one end of the week to the other. What amazed me was the fact that the farmers were still asking us to come in for tea and scones, everywhere we went, despite the fact that we were in a pandemic.

It's very important as a vet to be good at your job. What they fail to tell you in school though is that you are many things more than a vet when you're out in the field. You have to be a counsellor, an adviser, a carer, a grocery shopper, someone who is very knowledgeable about the current crises affecting our planet, and a tea drinker – and having fulfilled all these roles, you might then have time to do some actual work!



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Highs and lows of clinical EMS

Jasmin Brooks (Fifth year, Cambridge)

I WILL spare you the details of my family's drawn out (and ongoing) move from the Isle of Wight to the New Forest, but suffice to say I didn't know where I would be living at the start of summer 2021, let alone back in January when I needed to book my EMS placements. Regardless, I decided to organise some EMS in the New Forest and some on the Isle of Wight. I have a good relationship with the practices on the island and hoped this would mean they would trust me more with procedures. I also wanted to build a relationship with some practices in the New Forest so that in the last two years of my studies I would have an idea of where I'd like to spend my time. By the start of summer, I had three weeks of EMS booked on the island followed by six weeks in the New Forest.

When summer came around my family were still on the Isle of Wight, so I started my first weeks of EMS with ease. The staff at the practice recognised me from my previous placement and so were happy to let me do a little more. My first high was being able to castrate and dehorn a calf, which I was so pleased about and wasn't expecting to do considering the time of year. But it had been discovered back at Easter that inbreeding had been going on for years on the farm and, as the farmer was unwilling to segregate his herd, the vet didn't want any delay in the castration programme.

Unfortunately, the house in the New Forest wasn't quite liveable in time for my second stint of EMS so I began my first week in the New Forest commuting from the Isle of Wight. This involved getting a lift to the ferry, taking the ferry, getting a train from the ferry to my car, and then driving to the surgery. It drained me massively and I felt that I wasn't my best self on placement. I was also a bit deflated as the practice was cancelling a lot of



A New Forest pony in Sway just opposite a yard I visited

its surgeries due to a shortage of vets, and some of the vets weren't comfortable with me being in the consult room given that clients had only just been allowed back in.

The following week I persuaded my parents that it would be better for me to half camp in the New Forest house, so my days weren't quite so long. I was also determined to get out of my comfort zone and start asking to get a bit more involved in the practice, even if it was small things. However, that's when Covid hit the practice and I had to go into isolation. The situation was made worse because although semi-camping in the house was OK for sleeping, it was incredibly lonely having to spend 10 full days there by myself with no entertainment other than a smidge of 3G. As my parents are vulnerable, going back to the island was not an option.

I informed my next placement (equine) of the situation, and they were happy for me to join them a bit later in my own car. I was anxious that this placement was now only six days long and so I wouldn't be trusted to do anything. My mood didn't improve to begin with as I had a dramatic first day of getting lost following the vet in my own car then calling the wrong number to refund the vet and waiting for a response from this random number before

redialling the right one. I then got lost again and my phone died due to me not realising my car USB port was not working! This was on the Friday, and I felt ashamed of myself all weekend for the first impression I gave to this new practice. I comforted myself with the memory of my first day at my equine practice on the Isle of Wight – I was sick in the vet's car, but I now get on really well with them. So, the next week I was prepared with many apologies, an enormous power pack and 100 per cent success finding all yards.

While I was only at this practice a week, I learnt so much and I was treated so well. They even said how helpful I had been all week and I really believed them! I'm looking forward to visiting them again in future.

Even though I had highs and lows this summer, I recommend that all students try to book placements away from home as, with the university paying my fuel costs, I was ultimately being paid to explore a beautiful place. It's also really important to pick yourself up after an unfortunate placement experience as you don't know what other experiences are around the corner that you could miss out on. There's a whole host of learning opportunities to find if you keep believing in the help and worth you bring while you're studying.

Veterinary vlogging to inspire future students

AS people, veterinary students are an incredibly dynamic group, with a whole range of interests both inside and outside of the profession. However, diversity in the profession is certainly lacking and applications to vet school can seem an intimidating experience. One vet student who is hoping to make the veterinary world and profession more accessible through vlogging and social media is May Yean Chua (@thatsmesunny), a final-year student at Cambridge. We spoke to her about her experience of starting her own YouTube channel alongside her veterinary studies and what advice she would give to anyone wanting to start vlogging themselves.

How would you describe your channel/social media?

Fun and educational is the theme! Currently, my YouTube channel provides veterinary school-related content to inspire pre-vet applicants to undertake this fulfilling journey as well as to provide a glimpse into the things we go through as vet students. I produce 'podcast-style' videos, interviewing other vet students about their experiences of the application process and vet school. The aim is for my channel and blog to act as a useful resource for potential vet school applicants; showcase bits of vet school life; the challenges we face; and some tips that are helping me survive vet school.

How did you get into vlogging?

Just like many other millennials, lockdown free time and several months of solitude inspired me to start a YouTube channel. What actually gave me the confidence to start was a meeting with the Cambridge doctor/YouTuber/productivity guru Ali Abdaal, who gave me sound advice and encouragement to just do it!



What are you hoping to achieve with your channel?

I hope to add value and inspire other students to pursue their passion for veterinary medicine. I also aim to offer some form of virtual mentorship through the 'advice-type' videos and create a community where vet students can connect and share their common vet school struggles.

How are you finding managing it alongside the veterinary course?

I will admit that producing videos is time-consuming, especially when it comes to video editing: the danger is that I enjoy it so much that I often lose track of time when I sit down to edit my videos!

Being in final year I found that, as long as I prioritise my work and manage my time efficiently, producing a video once a week is manageable. Plus, since we are in a lockdown, there is not much else you can do outside of vet school, so I fill my time with making videos.

What is the favourite thing you've done with your channel so far?

My favourite thing so far has been interviewing other vet students from different universities. I find it so interesting to hear about their

journey and connect with them over the call. It has been the most social activity I have achieved over lockdown (outside of speaking to my housemates of course).

Through the channel, I have also received many heart-warming comments and messages from viewers, including a 12-year-old who asked for veterinary-related book recommendations!

What have you learnt from vlogging?

I have learnt so much through doing YouTube! Besides learning the technical side of producing videos, I also learnt how to reach out to people via cold emails and network with other people in the veterinary industry. Besides that, talking to a camera has helped build my confidence in public speaking. This skill has come in handy especially when I have had to present clinical cases to clinicians during rotations.

What would you recommend to anyone else interested in vlogging in the future? Is there anything you would have done differently?

If you have an interest in building a social media presence as a vet student, or if you want to create informative videos/posts to combat misinformation in the internet, I would say JUST DO IT! Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and don't worry about what other people would think. As long as you're aware of your intentions going into it and you don't obsess over the number of 'followers' or 'subscribers' (because it can be a vanity metric); I think it can be a fun way to productively procrastinate.

Anything I would have done differently? I wish I had started making videos since my first year of university.

What are you planning to do next (both vet- and YouTube channel-related)?

After (hopefully) qualifying as a vet, I hope to take this channel further and help combat misinformation on the internet by providing evidence-based

information on pet care and animal welfare issues. I hope my channel can act as a platform to engage the public with accessible information and encourage them to have better relationships with their vets.

As for the veterinary side of

things, I am hoping to go into general practice as a mixed animal or small animal vet.

● Check out May's work for yourself: www.youtube.com/user/thatsmesunny and <https://thatsmesunny.com/>

Yoga for everyone

Tell us about yourself

My name is Lucy Newman, my pronouns are she/her, I'm 22 and I've just started my fourth year at Nottingham vet school. I'm super passionate about wildlife and conservation medicine so I intend to pursue this in my future career – I also hope to combine it with my enormous love of travel. My other hobbies include going to the gym, running, growing my extensive houseplant collection (it's becoming a problem!), reading lots of books, hiking, writing and, of course, studying and practising yoga and meditation.

I'm also really passionate about educating myself and others, as well as advocating for system change, on issues of social, environmental and climate justice; this also ties into my study of yoga as it is a pathway for life which intends to culminate in freedom, happiness and peace for all beings.

How did you get into yoga and why did you decide to become a yoga teacher?

My interest in yoga began after I attended my first class when I was 15; from that point onwards I became increasingly fascinated with and in awe of this beautiful practice. In the seven years that yoga has been a part of my life, I have been practising regularly at various classes and on my own. I've attended yoga retreats and read lots of books on its history and philosophy. For my 21st birthday, my Mum enrolled me onto a yoga teacher training



course and I qualified last year after completing a year of training with a wonderful teacher in the Lake District who I'd met on a retreat.

A few years into my yoga 'journey' (so cringey but true!) I discovered that my Grandma had been a yoga teacher back in the 1980s so it was obviously meant to be!

How are you finding teaching yoga alongside your studies?

Studying veterinary medicine is always hectic, having to juggle busy timetables, study and revision, exams and placements along with everything else, but I think it's really important to spend time doing other things too, not only for the sake of mental health but also to gain wider practical, social and life skills.

I really enjoy having other responsibilities outside of my degree course as it helps to maintain a

balance between studying and my other passions. Interestingly, I often find that when I set myself deadlines around my university work in order to allocate time to teach, practise or study yoga, I am much more motivated and efficient – it's definitely all about time management! Of course there are times when I can't do everything, which is totally fine, and that is when the art of prioritisation is key (something I'm definitely still working on).

What's your favourite thing about yoga and about teaching it?

As clichéd as it is, I love that yoga is for everyone – no matter what size, shape, gender, age, fitness level, experience or anything at all! There truly is a yoga practice to suit each person and the physical, mental and emotional benefits of it can really be limitless.

It is so heart-warming when people say that they enjoyed their practice and leave the session feeling happy and restored; it truly makes my day.

What are you hoping to achieve with teaching yoga?

Through sharing yoga with others I hope to cultivate and encourage collective compassion for all, by allowing people the time and space and providing them with the tools to nurture themselves and enhance their wellbeing, which in turn will enable them to better support their friends, families, peers and members of their communities.

In terms of my wider ambitions regarding yoga, I am dedicated to teaching people the authentic truth of the practice and honouring its sacred origins. Yoga is a spiritual practice that originated in India thousands of years ago and has roots in Hinduism – it is so much more than just a physical activity, as is often depicted in the Western world, and it's only when we embrace all parts of yoga that we can reap the benefits. As a white yoga teacher I have a responsibility to appropriately acknowledge the sacred wisdom from which I have learnt everything that I know about the practice, and defer to Indian and Desi teachers as the true experts.

What have you learnt from doing it? Anything unexpected?

I have been really pleasantly surprised by the enthusiastic response

to yoga from my fellow vet students and others within the veterinary community – I really didn't expect there to be so much interest! As we know, there is a huge drive to improve mental health and wellbeing within the profession at the moment (which is so necessary and important) and I think that, as a result, many people have started looking for alternative ways to take care of their minds and bodies, and yoga is a wonderful option. I've led online sessions for various veterinary congresses, societies and campaigns, and they have all been received really well which just makes me so happy!

What advice would you give to anyone else interested in taking up yoga or teaching a sport alongside their studies?

Although it may be a challenge, if you are really passionate about something then you should always try to create time to spend doing it – life is meant to be enjoyed so you should fill it with all of the things that you love. It may not always be feasible or possible, and there's always going to be peaks and troughs in how much time you can dedicate to hobbies outside of studying for your degree, but if you do have the opportunity to carry out additional training alongside being at university and you feel that you will be able to appropriately manage your time, then I would say to absolutely go for it!

The important thing to remember is not to overload yourself; studying

veterinary medicine is very demanding in various ways so it's absolutely fine if it isn't the right time for you to pursue other things – it's crucial that we all know when we need to rest, say no or prioritise our own wellbeing. Take care of yourself first!

Is there anything you would have done differently?

Perhaps having more faith in myself, my knowledge and my abilities and giving myself some credit – we often talk about imposter syndrome in veterinary medicine but it definitely applies to other situations too!

What are you planning to do next (both vet- and yoga-related)?

Moving forward, I intend to run lots of inclusive yoga sessions both within and outside of the veterinary community, with a particular focus on making them accessible and welcoming to marginalised groups. I'm looking forward to teaching classes in person for the first time too!

In February I ran a three-week meditation course for the LGBT+ community, in collaboration with the University of Nottingham EDI team for LGBT+ History Month, which was really wonderful and rewarding, so I would love to run more workshop sessions like that in future.

In terms of my veterinary studies, I am hoping to carry out some wildlife and conservation-based clinical placements abroad during the summer but other than that, the goal is to just keep learning!



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Polocrosse – the most fun you can have on a horse?

Sophie Biswas (Fifth year, Cambridge)

POLOCROSSE captivates you from the minute you watch your first chukka. It's fast paced, tactical, highly addictive and one hell of a lot of fun, even if you're just spectating. In the summer of 2013, I got my first taste of the sport, became hooked, quit Pony Club and from then on it was all I wanted to fill my time with!

As its name suggests, polocrosse combines polo and lacrosse. Each rider uses a racquet to pick up and throw a rubber ball, with the aim being to score through your opponent's goal posts. Polocrosse is most widely played in Australia and although it's still a small sport in the UK, it's growing year by year and currently has 16 clubs nationwide. We play most weekends throughout the summer; but in recent years we've been able to get our fix all year round with the introduction of winter and spring arena leagues.

Who's it for?

It's a sport for everyone. Anybody can give it a go; all abilities are welcome and it's a fantastic family sport with a relaxed atmosphere – you'll soon make lots of friends. What struck me initially was how refreshing it was to play with people of any age and gender. My mum has been my teammate a couple of times and it's not unusual to play with riders twice your age. It's also one of the only sports where you'll see absolute beginners and lead-rein divisions alongside UK world cup players at an event. We're all there to have a laugh, get stuck into a game we love, cheer each other on and make friends for life.

Any horse is suitable for polocrosse, from your everyday leisure horse to your highly trained, bred-for-purpose athletes. It's not even necessary to own your own horse, there are plenty of ways to hire and



get involved. You'll be surprised by how quickly most horses will accept the racquet and ball, but they must be comfortable in close contact with other horses.

A lot of people (especially parents) start their riding careers through polocrosse because the sport is so engaging to watch. Once you've picked up a racquet and got the hang of throwing, it'll be no time before you're inspired to hop on a horse! But if you already ride, you'll find that you have many transferable skills from other disciplines.

Sociable and fun

The grass season starts in May, and clubs host tournaments most weekends, with people arriving on the Friday night and playing between three and five games over Saturday and Sunday. It's like a big camping trip with all your mates and a bit of competitive fun thrown in. We camp in tents, caravans or horse-boxes and our horses are penned. You've got to bring all the stuff you need for yourself and your horse for the weekend – packing can be a hefty job.

After pool games on the Saturday, we all race for the showers and get ready for a meal and the big Saturday night party. Often there's optional fancy dress and the most silly or outrageous (usually minimal!) outfit wins. You'll find out who you're playing the following day and players over the age of 16 umpire at least one slot on their own horse over the weekend – it's hard luck if that's 8 am on Sunday morning!

How is the game played?

There are different grades depending on your level of experience and whether you're over 16. The adult grades range from E to A, with E being the slowest paced and suited to beginners or horses new to the game. Skill levels increase up the grades, with the top-flight players in A grade.

Each match consists of six to eight chukkas, lasting usually six minutes each (maximum eight minutes). Each team has six players, divided into two sections of three players, who play alternate chukkas. The three positions are the No.1 'attack', No.2 'centre' and No.3 'defence'. The field is shorter than a polo pitch (55 m x 146.5 m), with three separate areas. All numbers can play in the centre area and there are goal-scoring areas at either end, which only the No.1 of the attacking team and the No.3 of the defending team can play in.

The game starts with all the players lined up in order and the umpire throws the ball in. Players can pick up the rubber ball, ride with it and pass it around. When carrying the ball, you must carry it on your stick side (ie, right handers carry it on their right). The ball cannot be carried over the penalty lines to enter the goal-scoring areas – instead it must be bounced and recaptured or passed over. ▶



Only the No.1 is able to score goals by throwing the ball through two upright posts. Each goal scoring area has a 'D' that No.1s and No.3s can ride through, but the goal must be scored while the No.1 is outside the D. Your options for defence are riding the opposition off their line, hitting their racquets (in an upwards direction only, unlike lacrosse) and mirroring their turns to prevent them from either catching the ball or scoring a goal.

Polocrosse is a light contact sport and safety is paramount, so crossing a horse's lines, stopping over the ball, elbowing, downwards hits and sandwiching between two players would be classified as fouls and result in a free throw to the offended side.

Polocrosse versus polo

Polocrosse is often confused with polo, but other than the fact they both involve a ball and horses, they are quite different sports. First, it costs only around £65 for senior player entry to a polocrosse tournament – including two days of play, camping, facilities and the Saturday meal and entertainment, whereas you can be looking at over £400 to play a single polo match.

Most notably, in polocrosse you ride only one horse for the entire tournament, unlike in polo where a string of ponies can be used in a match and you can rotate horses during a chukka. For this reason – and because we love them – we take very good care of our horses' health and welfare. Left handers are also more than welcome in polocrosse. They often have a slight advantage

as it can be difficult to get on their stick-side.

In polo, they prefer horses with a fast top speed and although this is advantageous in polocrosse, the sport is suited to horses that are able to stop and change direction quickly. Often, failed polo ponies find their way into polocrosse as they are too 'hot' and turn on a sixpence – not ideal for a level hitting platform in polo, but perfect for us to dodge the opposition in polocrosse! The sport also lends itself to retrained racehorses, as their agility and trainability allows for a smooth transition.

The beauty of polocrosse is that most of the gear you need can be found in your average tack room. You can ride in normal general-purpose tack and there's not much special equipment required, although some players choose to ride in western or stock saddles that hold you in more when you're bending over.

There are some specific requirements in the rulebook: your horse must wear bandages (or boots) and overreach boots on all four legs to prevent tendon injuries; every saddle must have an over-girth as extra protection against saddle slip; all tails must be plaited and taped up to prevent racquet entanglement and every player must wear an appropriately fitted helmet. It's also recommended players wear knee guards for when they're riding off opponents and it's optional to wear a face guard. Finally, every player needs their own racquet, which can be picked up for under £100, but these can be provided by clubs when you first polocrosse.

Equine health and welfare

Although we aim to look after our horses to the best of our ability, injuries inevitably occur in a fast pace, stop-start sport like this. Turning tightly and stopping quickly in any equestrian sport can cause tendon injuries – specifically with the superficial digital flexor tendons in the forelimbs. Specific to polocrosse, with the rider often leaning to one side to pick up the ball, the hypaxial back muscles can be put under considerable strain as they try to counterbalance the rider's weight.

For these reasons, it is vitally important to have a strict fitness plan to bring horses into work gently and consistently, so that they are in the best shape to perform and to reduce the risk of such injuries. Allowing enough time to warm up your horse is key and most players walk their horses several times a day to stretch their legs and reduce lower limb swelling.

We need to take into account the heat of the summer months too, giving longer breaks between chukkas and lots of water to cool down with. At every event, there is a vet on standby to attend to injuries that arise or 'vet out' lame horses. There is also always a farrier on-site, to replace any pulled shoes. All-in-all, we love our horses immensely and we have measures in place to ensure that their health is our top priority.

Come and try it!

So, polocrosse is a lesser-known, thrilling team sport that everybody falls in love with. Whether you're playing, goal judging or just coming to cheer on and have a social, you're bound to have a good time.

If you'd like to have a go, you can find your regional rep on the UK Polocrosse Association website (<https://ukpolocrosse.co.uk/>) who can put you in touch with your nearest club. You don't need to have your own horse, have ridden before or have ever picked up a racquet.

If you're looking for a fun, sociable team sport that's also affordable, come and join in – I promise you'll never look back!

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