

## SHORT CONTRIBUTION

# Ten tips to ease the transition from student to veterinarian

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### THE TIPS

1. Get experience dealing with people in a service or leadership role
2. Develop competence with interpersonal skills, basic technical skills, common conditions
3. Arrange to keep personal readjustments to a minimum
4. Make contacts that may lead to a good job
5. Select boss with great care
6. Get it in writing
7. Make clear that you are prepared to learn
8. Consider the feelings of others
9. Take steps to maintain mental and physical health

These tips have been developed as a result of comments from recent graduates and their employers, both in discussion, on questionnaires and in feedback on numerous drafts, and are offered in the hope that they may help younger colleagues minimise their levels of stress. Comments and suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

It is suggested that you consider the process of achieving a low-stress transition in three steps: (a) those that can be taken in advance; (b) those associated with getting the job itself, and (c) those to take after starting work.

### In advance

Take steps to minimise stress from other people (see Tip 1), your initial competence (Tip 2), your personal life (Tip 3) and the job itself (Tips 4-5).

**Tip 1. Get experience dealing with people in a service or leadership role:** For example, in practices, other animal enterprises such as the racing industry, shows, or in non veterinary enterprises such as bars, shops, restaurants, service stations and so on.

**Tip 2. Develop competence with:**

- interpersonal skills – think of words that you may use when introducing yourself, welcoming clients, terminating consultations, dealing with fees, breaking bad news, and so on;
- basic technical skills – especially animal handling, clinical examinations, surgical basics (for example, suturing, handling tissue, instruments), and
- common conditions – learn protocols and drugs and prepare an indexed record of them while you have time, even though later you may need to modify these to suit practice protocols. After getting a job, check any special local veterinary features such as unusual plant and animal species, parasites, toxins and so on..

**Tip 3. Arrange to keep personal readjustments to a minimum.** If living at home, get experience with domestic chores before shifting away; try to avoid separating from partner at time of starting work.

**Tip 4. Make contacts that may lead to a good job:** through practical work; other work in practices; visits to practices; through veterinarians met at conferences, or through those primary contacts.

### The job itself

Seek the best possible boss (Tip 5) and get your offer in writing (6).

**Tip 5. Select boss with great care,** as the boss (apart from yourself) is the key ingredient in determining the stress level of the transition. But make sure you know who really is the boss (many graduates have been dominated by the principal's spouse or other practice manager)!

- Who to look for? Someone who will be supportive and fair and encourage learning with progressive independence; maintain high standards of professional work, ethics and interpersonal interactions, and someone with whom you could develop a good (synergistic or, at least, symbiotic) working relationship. It is preferable to seek a practice with more than one other veterinarians because there are less 'after hours' and more to learn from.
- How to find one? Use contacts where possible, and advertisements and agencies.
- How to know you've found one? Be critical in your evaluation; ask previous associates; ask is it a New Graduate Friendly Practice under the auspices of the AVA?
- Should I take the first job offered? Only if you are confident that the job and the boss are right for you. But do not delay in reaching a decision, because this can cause problems for the employer.

**Tip 6. Get it in writing.** Ensure you get a contract or letter stating the precise conditions of your employment. Failure to do this may lead to misunderstanding, resentment or worse. The Award will cover most details, but a written offer (and acceptance) is still desirable.

### After starting work

Work at learning (Tip 7), fitting in (Tips 7-8), staying fit (Tip 9) and being professional (Tip 10).

**Tip 7. Make clear that you are prepared to learn.** Look, ask, listen, think, take advice and learn.

**Tip 8. Consider the feelings of others,** including the boss, who must maintain the practice while helping you settle in; and also those of nurses, colleagues and clients, all of whom may have much to offer. Clean up after yourself; consider personal

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hygiene; in general, imagine yourself in their place. Never underestimate the importance of an animal to its owner.

Tip 9. Take steps to maintain mental and physical health.

- Get enough rest, especially at the beginning when it will be especially tiring.
- Get enough exercise, both for health and as an escape from work. Sporting clubs can also help acceptance into the community and help overcome loneliness and homesickness
- Retain old friendships; they too can help overcome loneliness and provide reassurance that you are not the only one in that situation (note, take advantage of cheap phone deals!).
- Make new friendships; may be difficult in a new town but social, sporting and church activities may be helpful.
- Discuss problems, do not internalise them. Discussions with the boss, other practice colleagues or classmates can provide reassurance, reduce stress and encourage learning.

Seek help from support groups and programs or from a professional counsellor before problems become acute.

Tip 10. Think and act as a professional person.

- Dress, speak and generally comport yourself in a professional way; this will help you feel, and be accepted as, a professional person.
- Mentally rehearse professional interactions in advance, concentrating on a successful technical and interpersonal performance.
- Have confidence in yourself; this will be detected by clients, especially if warranted. This should help acceptance by clients and foster growing confidence.
- Avoid appearing tentative and uncertain (even if you feel that way), as this will also be detected by clients and their reaction may further undermine confidence.
- Avoid appearing over-confident or worse, arrogant; these may result from feelings of inadequacy, but they can lead to alienation and, in turn, to decreased self-esteem.

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## BOOK REVIEW

***A Guide to Lizards – CD ROM.*** Walters M, Voyce M, Zwat P et al. Krieger, Melbourne, Florida, 1999. Price US\$55.00. ISBN 1-57524-117-X

This CD-ROM aims to provide 'a comprehensive guide to the care and treatment of lizards' for veterinarians and nurses. It is produced by The Royal Veterinary College as the first in the Exotics Series (to follow soon are *A Guide to Snakes* and *A Guide to Chelonia*). Minimum computer specifications for use are Windows 3.1, 3.11, 95, 98 or NT, 4 speed or greater CD-ROM, 16MB RAM, 16 bit colour display, a Pentium 100 processor and Windows compatible sound card and speakers. Around 10MB hard disk space is required for installation. These requirements should be met easily by most current Windows compatible systems. There is no support for Apple computer systems.

There are four main sections: Basics, Procedures, Diseases and Resources. Each section is divided into chapters. Within each chapter are graphics, audio and video sequences, together with a Key Points summary. Some chapters include interactive case reports to emphasise key points.

The Basics' section is divided into two chapters: Biology and Husbandry. Basic lizard biology is provided in a clear and concise manner together with an introduction to identification and anatomy of lizard species. This section is well-structured and provides a good introduction to lizards for veterinary nurses and veterinarians.

The Procedures' section is comprised of four chapters: Examination, Diagnostics, Therapy and Theatre. The importance of history-taking is well-emphasised in the Examination section. Diagnostics gives an overview of common techniques used to determine health and ill health in lizards, with emphasis on techniques unique to lizards. Therapy is a short chapter that outlines where and how to give injections and provides an overview of supportive care and euthanasia techniques. No drug dose rates or guides are given here; it is expected the user will view and print out the formulary in the Resources' section. The Theatre section gives an overview of anaesthesia, surgical principles and outlines the approach to a celiotomy.

The Diseases' section covers only four diseases or syndromes: metabolic bone disease, renal disease, cystic calculi and Dystocia. The authors regard these as potentially common diseases that are difficult to deal with by those new to reptile medicine. It would have been useful to have included other diseases in this section such as cloacal prolapse or mite infestation (although these are listed in the Resources' section). Perhaps the next edition will include more detail. The presentation of the four diseases is excellent and clear.

The Resources' section contains references, a formulary, common diseases and client handouts. The most useful part of this section is the excellent forms for use in practice such as the patient history form. I use a modified form for all my lizard clients. The glossary is useful, although limited, and would be improved with hotlinks to the relevant areas in the main chapters. The small section on Computer Study Skills would have been better placed at the start of the CD-ROM, as it is unlikely those needing this section would find it easily in the first place.

Overall, I found this an excellent resource. I am delighted to find (finally) a veterinary CD-ROM that is professionally designed and produced and user-friendly. The layout is excellent and I thoroughly recommend it to veterinarians and veterinary nurses who wish to expand their knowledge of lizards. You will enjoy using it.

### B Carmel

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