Understanding & Reorganizing Interprofessional Roles

Veterinary practices involve a variety of individuals performing patient- and client-oriented tasks; the increasing socio-economic importance of companion animals is driving this trend. However, it is unknown how team members will interact effectively, and research is needed to understand the ever-changing divisions within the practice.

Veterinary nursing has been professionalized and codified in the UK, where graduating nurses bear the title of RVN, are subject to disciplinary action, and swear a professional oath. This separation between occupation (to which anyone can belong) and profession (limited in admittance) is essential to establishing workplace roles. Because of increasing professional diversity, the functionality of these professions must be predicated on positive relationships.

Interprofessional practice (ie, the interface between veterinarians, nurses, and paraprofessional team members) is essential and likely impacts patient outcomes. Enabling nurses to provide veterinary preventive clinics is one strategy used in the UK to take advantage of nursing skills and motivate the public to seek veterinary care. However, instituting this concept creates some major challenges because traditional hierarchical structures are challenged and communication problems can occur. Interprofessional education may increase understanding of each position and role. More work is needed to determine if this or other approaches can improve the working relationships of veterinary team members.

Although the term “interprofessional education” may be new, the idea is not; the discussion of hierarchy and delegation is necessarily ongoing. Some veterinarians may cling to tasks that a technician could perform. The push toward providing cost-effective patient care could lead veterinary technicians to take on more patient-care roles, as have human medicine nurses.

This article highlights a void that is filled only when veterinarians recognize the need for their own education. Practice owners must delegate and monitor the manager’s work. Leadership and management are not exclusive; rather, great leaders know enough about management to ensure good management happens in their practice.—Carin Smith, DVM


The push toward providing cost-effective patient care could lead veterinary technicians to take on more patient-care roles, as have human medicine nurses.