A Look at Effective Veterinary Training

Dr. Susan Monger  
Founder and Director  
International Veterinary Consultants  
smonger@intlvet.org

Dr. Katherine Polak  
International Director of Animal Welfare  
Soi Dog Foundation  
katherine@soidog.org

Introduction

Improving animal welfare across the globe is dependent upon having adequately trained veterinarians. Animal shelters and local welfare charities routinely depend upon veterinary services to ensure the health of animals in their care. Veterinarians are required to diagnose and treat sick animals, perform sterilization and other surgical procedures, and perform humane euthanasia, when needed. While there is a growing number of newly graduated, trained veterinarians in places such as the US, Canada, and the UK, in many places internationally there remains a critical shortage of veterinarians adequate trained in small animal medicine and surgery. Such veterinarians may also lack training in subjects that are becoming a specialty in the US including shelter medicine, high-volume high-quality sterilization techniques, and canine/feline population control. Veterinary academic institutions, private veterinarians themselves, large animal welfare NGOs, and local charities can all play a role to help improve and deliver high-quality veterinary training.

Background of veterinary training

- Veterinary medicine is historically focused on economically important animals (livestock), not companion animals
- Veterinary institutions may lack training in small animal medicine and surgery
- Lack of training resources locally and regionally
- Local culture may not promote animal welfare

From students to surgeons – Why bother?

- Teaching humane procedures increases animal welfare
- Creates role models and mentors
- Instills desire to continue to learn and improve
- Increases respect for the veterinary profession and resultant increased animal welfare

Steps for veterinary training

1. Assess needs in the veterinary community – what subjects require training?
2. Determine the type of training program needed
3. Plan the training
4. Determine pre- and post-course considerations
5. Evaluate the clinic’s success

What does the veterinary community need?

Training in:

- Analgesia
- Anesthesia
- Surgery
- Ancillary procedures (enucleations, amputations)
- Medical treatment (experience in treating mange, TVT, distemper, parvovirus)
- Euthanasia
- Humane animal handling
- Shelter medicine

**Determine the type of training that best fits the need**

- Surgical
  - Small groups best
  - Takes time and experience
  - Focus on the basics
  - Gas anesthesia very helpful

- Medical
  - Best in controlled environment
  - Focus on common diseases and treatments
  - Use drugs and medications trainee has access to

- Euthanasia training
  - Understand cultural norms
  - What drugs are available

- Workshops
  - Determine root causes of animal issues
  - Involve stakeholders in developing solutions
  - Often needed for dog population management (DPM programs)

- Sheltering
  - Awareness of resources required
  - Focus on animal care, adoptions, fundraising, organizational governance
  - Combination of lecture/on-site activities

**Plan the training**

- Assess available equipment and supplies
- Drug availability
- Duration
- Location
- On-site translation
  - Knowledge of medical vocabulary
- Budget

**Assess the participants**

- Professional and cultural diplomacy
- Knowledge and skill level
  - Veterinary students
    1. Limited knowledge and skills
    2. Vet school may lack educational and training resources
  - Veterinarians
    1. May practice inappropriate technique
    2. Weren’t trained correctly
    3. May be resistant to change
Nurses – What do they need to know to be able to contribute sufficiently
  - Number?
    - Quality versus quantity

Train the trainers
  - This model focuses on training those who will then train others
  - Ensures sustainability
  - Magnifies “numbers”

Plan the curriculum – Focus on the basics!
  - Surgery
    - Physical examination
    - Principles of asepsis
    - Analgesia
    - Anesthesia
  - Dry versus wet labs
    - Ensures basic skills mastered first (suturing techniques, surgical knots)
    - No animals required
    - Cheap
  - Basic medicine
    - Physical exam (again!)
    - Basis SOAP approach to a case
    - Developing a treatment plan
  - Humane and safe animal handling

• Pre-course considerations
  - Send some basic training information prior to the course
  - Consider a pre-test to gauge skill and knowledge level

• Duration of training
  - Will depend upon the type of training
  - Surgical training takes a considerable amount of time

• Create a supply list
  - Assists with creation of a budget

• Instructors
  - Requires skill and patience
  - Great vets yet difficulty relaying information
  - When to let them make a mistake and when to intervene
  - Familiarity with local disease and frequent treatments

• Teach to what you (and participants) have to work with
  - Surgical supplies, especially drugs
  - Medical supplies
  - Improvising with local supplies

• Use of media
  - Recording training events
  - Workshops help promote animal welfare

• University partnerships
• Evaluating clinic’s success
  - Course evaluations
Follow-up
Ensures training is applied appropriately
Recognize that change is slow

Your organization’s role in training
Your organization can help be the catalyst for improving veterinary training though:

- Serving as a training site
- Helping to organize training for community veterinarians
- Partnering with the local veterinary university to establish a shelter medicine externship for students at your facility
- Identify international or regional training opportunities for your facility's veterinarian
- Contact the local veterinary university and assess their interest in holding a training session for students on shelter medicine and spay-neuter techniques. If you can confirm interest, there may be an international charity willing to provide a budget and trainer for such training.

Where to find training opportunities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dog’s Trust – International Veterinary Training Center</td>
<td>London, UK</td>
<td><a href="http://dogstrustinternational.com">http://dogstrustinternational.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humane Alliance (US)-</td>
<td>On-site (North Carolina, US), Online</td>
<td><a href="http://humanealliance.org">http://humanealliance.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Veterinary Consultants</td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td><a href="http://internationalveterinaryconsultants.org">http://internationalveterinaryconsultants.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soi Dog Foundation</td>
<td>Phuket, Thailand</td>
<td><a href="https://www.soidog.org">https://www.soidog.org</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable Veterinarians International</td>
<td>Central America</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sustainablevetsinternational.com">http://www.sustainablevetsinternational.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Vets</td>
<td>Granada, Nicaragua Training Center</td>
<td><a href="http://worldvets.org">http://worldvets.org</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>