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Some Requirements for the Equine Practitioner of Tomorrow

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This paper will differ somewhat from the scientific approach that usually characterizes a medical subject. Other than to mention two neglected phases of today's horse practice, we will give some opinions or advice that almost every human is anxious to pass on to willing or unwilling subjects.

Most of the recent graduates will go into general practice, in which case the equine portion will amount to only a small percent of their engaged activities. In fact, in most general practices of today, the percentage of equine calls would compare pretty close to the percentage of small animal calls a general practitioner would have made 25 or 30 years ago. Because of the economics involved, the present general practitioner will have a keener interest in small animal patients. This means that his attitude toward the horse calls will vary anywhere from luke warm to ice cold.

However, some recent graduates will locate in larger urban areas where comparatively large numbers of saddle horses and other breeds of light horses are kept. There is a possibility that the area might include a race track; in which case thoroughbreds, standardbreds or both are congregated at certain times of the year. The veterinarians interest in horses might have been only luke warm while in school but now he finds that the environment of the location plus the increasing number of equine calls have resulted in a change in his attitude toward the horse practice.

The third group of recent graduates will be very small. They have taken veterinary medicine with the idea of specializing in a horse practice. It will be rare when you find over one or two in a graduating class from a given college. In some classes there will be none. It is fortunate for equine husbandry that some interest is still shown in equine problems, even though the numbers engaged in that interest have diminished.

Requirements

What are the requirements for a successful equine practitioner? In reality they are a combination of the characteristics of the veterinarian which have been influenced by preveterinary training, veterinary training in college, and the period of so-called interning. One might ask, will these requirements be necessary for the horse practitioner of tomorrow? In my opinion they will become more important than ever for young practitioners as attempts toward specialization in the fields of obstetrics and sterility, medicine, and surgery are made. Most of these requirements would apply to a successful veterinarian of the past, present, or future regardless of what phase of practice he might be engaged in. The sequence in which the following seven requirements appear are based on observations, therefore, can be reduced to personal

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opinions. The order in which they appear might not necessarily apply (for example) to a small practitioner; however, six of the seven requirements would be listed.

1. Honesty and sincerity
2. Individual initiative
3. How he handles the patients
4. Personality and public relations
5. Personal appearance, which not only applies to himself but to his equipment.
6. Period of internship
7. Background or experiences previous to college training.

Requirement No. 1 Honesty and sincerity. Without these in the individual's make up, he will fail. The fact he holds a degree from a veterinary college should indicate that he has a record of honesty. I don't believe a college would graduate him if he was known to be dishonest.

Requirement No. 2. Individual initiative. The motive behind individual initiative results from the opportunity to work in the field in which one likes best. An equine practitioner must like horses; if he goes into it because of the monetary angle, he is very apt to be disappointed. It has been my observation that those engaged in a horse practice are in it because they like it. The fact that they work entirely with horses put them into rather a select group if compared with other groups of practitioners. Individual initiative is no more important to one group than to another group.

Requirement No. 3. How he handles the patients: in human medicine it would be called "bedside manners." Regardless of how high the graduate would rate on personality or personal appearance if he is afraid of horses or rough with horses he will not be successful in this field. Sometimes this roughness in handling the animal has resulted from fear of the animal. It is too bad that all veterinary students don't have to handle Thoroughbreds before they deal with any other of the domesticated animals. I am sure a larger percent would learn to control their tempers when the animals get out of hand. The Thoroughbred is usually easy to work with if an even temper is maintained, handled firmly but gently. Lose your temper and you are liable to have a few hundreds pounds of dynamite on your hands.

Requirement No. 4. Personality and public relations. While the trend of this part of a graduate's makeup can usually be ascertained during his undergraduate days, sometimes real development is slow, until experience during the internship. It is very important in a horse practice because many times you are dealing with the owner, the trainer, and one or more grooms. Without good personal relations with all, your work in a given stable will be limited. It is just as important to get along with the grooms as it is the owners or trainers.

Requirement No. 5. Personal Appearance, which includes equipment as well as clothing and personal cleanliness. This is not placed fifth on the list because it isn't important but it has been my observation that the other requirements rate ahead of it. This is based on the fact that while today's equine practitioner is clean in his personal appearance, some, not all, are careless in the care of their instruments and equipment. Yet the latter group enjoy good reputations because they are otherwise excellent practitioners.

Application in the Field

It is realized that working under field conditions one can't attain the degree of asepsis that is realized in a modern large animal hospital, but there are habits which can be formed and precautions taken in handling equipment that add prestige to the profession. This is one of the ways the veterinarian can keep the interest paid on the debt he owes to those responsible for his education and to the community in which he locates.

Unfavorable impressions can be formed by the owner, trainer, or groom when he sees a thermometer wiped on the animal's blanket or some straw and then placed in the thermometer case; or when syringes and hypodermic needles are re-
moved from the rusty compartment of the medicine case, rinsed with alcohol and water, used from animal without proper sterilization; or surgical instruments, such as an emasculator, carried loose in the bottom of the instrument bag, then placed in a bucket of milky colored aqueous antiseptic, assuming it is sterile.

Sometimes there is a tendency when doing equine surgery to believe it isn’t possible to follow complete aseptic techniques. When operating under field conditions and certain local operations in the standing position it is almost impossible to attain complete asepsis. Because of this fact, there are those (not confined to equine practitioners alone) who believe that since it isn’t possible to follow 100 percent aseptic techniques, then we can become bold with lack of precautions. Such precautions as properly prepared operative sites, freshly laundered or autoclaved cover-alls, well scrubbed hands and arms; sterile instruments, sutures, and rubber gloves; sterile drapes or shrouds (when possible to use) are not going to lessen the chances of success of the surgery. It is my belief that the equine practitioner of tomorrow is going to have to pay more attention to aseptic techniques than has been true in the past or present.

Requirement No. 6. Period of internship. The term internship is used rather broadly here because in my opinion every recent graduate goes through a period of internship regardless of whether he starts a horse practice on his own, works for a lone practitioner, or joins a group of veterinarians.

In the past, it has been true that veterinarians have gone directly from college into a horse practice and made a success of it. It is not the intent here to imply it can’t be done in the future. However, this period of internship is going to be considerably longer, especially when there is competition in the area.

The influence of working with a good practitioner will have a lasting effect upon the recent graduate. He will not only become familiar with the technical problems connected with the practice but will learn some things about the business aspects of the practice. This association will certainly save him the embarrassment of the mistakes he would make while interning on his own.

Some of the partnerships of tomorrow will be formed from a recent graduate having interned with a lone veterinarian. Sometimes the latter will have neglected certain phases of his practice. Equine dentistry is often a neglected phase of a horse practice. The recent graduate can work at this during the periods when practice is slower as well as take care of the emergency dental problems. Internal parasite control is another phase usually neglected by a busy practitioner. Here again the junior veterinarian can be a great deal of service to the clientele. Whenever the results of the association works for the benefit of both, then a foundation will have been laid for the partnership.

Another type of internship can be found when a recent graduate locates with a clinic group of veterinarians engaged in a horse practice. It is in this association that he will see the nearest thing to specialization, although the latter word is somewhat loosely used. He will come under the influence of different members of the group who have concentrated on certain phases of the practice. The chances of the recent graduate joining a group such as this on a permanent basis, after his period of internship, depends on the area and his ability to contribute service to the practice. The influence of interning with groups of two or more veterinarians serving an area will result in the stimulating force from which new clinic groups will be formed.

Requirement No. 7. Preveterinary background, which means his experience with horses previous to his college training.

This requirement is similar to the previous one. Just as you find veterinarians who go into a horse practice directly out of school, occasionally you will find an equine practitioner who had little or no experience with horses previous to his college training. However, it has been my observation that the majority have
worked with horses before entering college.

To lend encouragement to those who have not had much experience with horses previous to college training, let it be said no one will have the perfect background. The reason for this statement is that no one will ever know all there is to be known about horses either before or after college. For example, one might have worked with saddle horses as a groom prior to college training; should he work with Thoroughbreds after graduation, he will find there is a lot he doesn't know about the care of the feet and legs. The same would be true of Standardbreds.

There is no intent to show that one background is more important than another. They all have one thing in common the individual should have learned how to handle horses, to have become familiar with certain breeds, and to have learned the horseman's language. If the experience occurred on a stud farm, he should have learned about the care of brood mares, stallions, and foals. If he worked as a groom, he would have learned about proper feeding methods, and the care of the feet and legs.

My advice to a student who intends to specialize in a horse practice is to work with or to work on a stud farm. If he would do this each summer following the freshman and sophomore years, he would enter the junior year with a better understanding of horses; then work with a veterinarian between the junior and senior years.

Seven requirements have been listed which seem necessary in order to become a successful horse practitioner. Not much has been mentioned about the college training, however, it is assumed that all the recent graduates interested in a horse practice have equal training. Little has been mentioned about business ability but it has been assumed the new graduate will learn of the business aspects of a practice by the association with a good practitioner.

There is a bright future for a limited number desirous of becoming equine practitioners provided they are willing to work hard, like horses, and haven't chosen this field because they expect to become rich. There is also a bright future for the general practitioner located in a heavily populated horse area. However, this general practitioner will have to become accustomed to the idea of seeing some of those who have specialized in a horse practice, come into his territory and (in plain language) skim off the cream.

Horses on farms Jan. 1, 1951, were estimated at 4,763,000 compared with 5,274,000 a year earlier. The present number is about 78% below the peak of 21,431,000 head reached in 1915.

Dogs move freely in surprisingly small quarters, although to get proper exercise, an enclosure should be long enough to permit the dog to break into a gallop and to run for a very short distance. This requires in the outside runway a length of 30 ft. for a Fox Terrier and 40 ft. for a Setter.

If space and cost do not prohibit, erect the inside stalls large and commodious. They are essentially living and sleeping quarters, and are not considered sufficient for proper exercise.

Mules are considered dumb animals, but did you every try to overload a mule? Did you ever try to make one cross an unsafe bridge? They just won't take a chance. Mules may be stubborn—but they are not dumb.

Many of us could take a lesson from the mule. As we go about our daily work we must learn to recognize a dangerous condition and then resolve not to work under these conditions. Let's “fix up” and avoid “bang up.”

Barrenness in the mare may be simply an indication that she is not up to the job of bearing and rearing a foal every year.

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