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Veterinary skills education: above all do no harm**

The practice of veterinary medicine requires the professional to be well versed in the facts and principles, adept at professional interactions, and expert in the various clinical/technical skills inherent to the job. The perception of the veterinary medical professional is that of one who cares for and about animals, however a disconnect has tended to occur during the learning years. Presumption has been that in order to gain the proper knowledge and skill that will allow one to care for animals in one's career, one must cease to care about animals for the time in training.

The first step toward rectifying this wrong is acknowledging that it is unacceptable. The second step is to allow oneself freedom from the academic notion of 'That is how we have always taught it.' From there, many obstacles become easy.

We can help students learn principles and skills by beginning with the simple and progressing to the complex, slowly integrating time critical events and detailed procedures as mastery is achieved. This allows us to morally/ethically utilize the invaluable learning tool of the live animal in need of care.

An extension of this concept is to utilize Service Learning experiences to the benefit of the students and the animals. Cadavers are invaluable tools for learning veterinary knowledge and skills. Borrowing from decades of human medicine education, we can procure these cadavers from Willd Body Programs or Educational Memorial Programs utilizing animals who have died of or been euthanized due to natural causes.

We have technological capabilities that we never imagined possible 5-10 years ago. Students can now learn using tools of such variety, depth, reality, and complexity. Demanding mastery, allowing progressive improvement, incorporating compassion as a learning objective, allowing for individuality in learning styles, choosing learning tools based on the goal of 'doing no harm'... all are critical to progress in this area.