

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR  
ASPIRING EQUINE VETS

# NEXTVet

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## Balancing Life and Veterinary Profession

ERIN DENNEY-JONES, DVM

**O**ur love of animals is the primary reason most of us become veterinarians. We enjoy their unconditional love, but sometimes we have a hard time returning that love when it is 2 a.m. in the dead of winter or 8 a.m. on Christmas morning. We must remember that animals don't know that it is our birthday or a holiday or midnight

when they get sick or injured. With this in mind, there are many factors to consider before committing to a career in equine veterinary medicine. The most obvious factor is the hours you dedicate to your job, but others include the physical demands, emergency work, and emotional/financial strain. Experienced equine veterinarians have historically brought in more income than the experienced small animal

"Well, while you are here, Doc ..."



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veterinarians, but since the recession we have seen a drop in equine veterinarian salaries as well as fewer job opportunities. So how do you enjoy both an equine veterinary career and foster a personal life?

### Overcoming Obstacles

One of the main hurdles equine veterinarians face is an unstructured lifestyle. Those who are structured in life and like to follow a schedule must learn to be a bit more flexible because of the untimely emergency call or the "Well, while you are here, Doc ..." type interruptions in day-to-day life. Some of these can be controlled, such as rescheduling a long procedure or joining a multi-veterinarian practice that shares emergency calls. But there will still be days when you'll need to scrap the schedule and see more important calls. Maybe you want to limit your practice to a specialty such as equine dentistry, reproduction, or

*Continued on next page*

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## Words TO LIVE BY

**“ Upon graduation you are probably going to hear the words, ‘You look too young to be a doctor.’ This may be accompanied by owner trepidation about you working on their horse. Be confident, polite, and use your knowledge and skills as a veterinarian. Pretty soon they will be asking for ‘that young doctor.’ ”**

— Beau Whitaker, DVM, Dr. T’s Equine Clinic

acupuncture/chiropractic in order to avoid the emergency schedule. Remember, however, that these pursuits typically do well only if the veterinarian has some regular practice experience prior to opening them.

Maintaining physical fitness is another challenge. The physical aspect of the job is demanding; thus, you must take care of yourself. Working out, for instance, can help not only with strengthening and weight control but also with emotional stresses. I plan to work out in the mornings when emergency calls are less likely. I have never been a morning person, but I have had to overcome that with this profession.

Finding time for personal relationships as an equine veterinarian also is difficult. My spouse, however, has been my secret to keeping my sanity. While he is not a “horse person,” he certainly understands that horses don’t know what day it is when they get sick. There have been numerous times a sick horse has altered our personal plans. During the first year of my practice, for instance, my husband wanted to take our annual vacation in June, just as we had done years prior. I was concerned about the timing because I was still breeding mares, so I asked my clients to work around that week we were gone. To my surprise they agreed, and I got a nice sanity check with a week off. Most clients understand that you need vacations too, as long as you communicate with them ahead of time.

Building friendships outside of work is another challenge, especially if you take a job in another city or state. Group sports activities or other interests are a good way to meet new

friends, as you should have a healthy separation of business and personal life. If not, that line of separation might blur and you could jeopardize a client relationship.

A 24/7-type business can be hard on a family as well, but family should still be a priority. As Jay Merriam, DVM, owner of Massachusetts Equine Clinic, in Uxbridge,



**The physical aspect of equine veterinary practice is demanding.**

Mass., relates, he only missed two soccer games while his two children were growing up. His wife would get the soccer schedule at the beginning of the school year and put games on Merriam’s appointment schedule.

With the new generation of veterinarians wanting to enjoy life a bit more, I believe there will be more of a trend toward group practices than solo practices. Keep in mind, however, that for a group practice to work everyone must bring in their share of the pie. A group practice employs support staff and other veterinarians

who can help with client communications, emergency work, and case work-ups. And helping it grow means more job security. Growing the practice might mean spending some time at horse shows on the weekends or speaking at a feed store or 4-H club meeting. You will have to actively seek those opportunities and create your own niche that supports your salary. This also gives your employer(s) a reason to keep you on staff or even make you part of their ownership, which can provide more flexibility in your work schedule.

### Take-Home Message

A “new normal” for practice is on the horizon, and new graduates will create it, in part, by remapping equine veterinary practice. Clinical practice, however, is not the only career option in this field. A basis of practicing veterinary medicine is a start but “you must also want to think of your exit plan,” says Mary DeLorey, DVM, who owns Northwest Equine Dentistry, near Seattle, Wash. She believes you should be aware of and confident in your career choice because it is a 30- to 35-year career.

After 20 years of practice, first as an intern, then as an associate at an equine hospital, solo ambulatory practitioner, and group practice clinic owner, I am still satisfied with the career I have chosen. As Tim Ellis, DVM, partner of Mid-Rivers Equine Centre, in New Melle, Mo., has always told me: “It is a privilege to wake up every day and be able to work on the most magnificent animal: the horse.”

**Erin Denney-Jones, DVM**, owns Florida Equine Veterinary Services Inc., in Clermont.



# STUDENTSpotlight

## Kristen Cleary

**K**risten Cleary, a 28-year-old Brightwaters, N.Y., native did not follow the typical route to veterinary school. An expected Class of 2014 graduate at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine, Cleary originally received a law degree from the University of Virginia School of Law but decided not to pursue a legal career.

"I realized I wasn't going to enjoy my life and that (law) wasn't for me," she explained. "I reevaluated my choices up to that point and looked at what I really loved and what I really should have done ... I decided that I wanted to be a veterinarian."

### Advice TO HER PEERS

"When I'm trying to make a decision I've learned that I really just need to try to follow my heart, free of others' influences."

Inspired by her lifelong love for horses, Cleary returned to square one, earning the necessary requirements to be accepted into the University of Minnesota equine program. "She has gone out of her way to get extra pragmatic training in equine medicine since then," said Julie Wilson, DVM, Dipl. ACVIM, of Turner Wilson Equine Consulting, who has worked extensively with Cleary. So far Cleary's student experiences include:

#### ■ **Student Colic Team Coordinator**

Cleary heads the student colic team, which allows veterinary students to observe and participate in colic calls and other emergencies at Leatherdale Equine Center and the Large Animal Hospital on a rotating basis depending on skill level.

#### ■ **YMCA Horse Exams**

She was one of a handful of veterinary students that helped perform physical exams and vaccinations to ready hundreds of horses for YMCA summer camp.

#### ■ **Research Assistant**

Alongside Wilson and Krishona Martinson, PhD, Cleary spent two summers evaluating round bale feeders for a study that's been published in a peer-reviewed journal. The team studied nine different feeders using 25 horses and, according to Cleary, "We didn't come out saying this is the best (feeder), but we could say, 'If this is your financial situation, and this is how many horses you have, this is something that might work for you.'"

#### ■ **Genetics Lab Research**

Cleary received the Morris Animal Foundation Award in 2011 for her work on "Candidate genes underlying energy metabolism in the Thoroughbred and Standardbred" in the genetics lab of Molly McCue,

DVM, MS, PhD, Dipl. ACVIM.

#### ■ **VetPAC Peer Coach**

Cleary helps tutor fellow classmates in courses she has excelled in previously.

#### ■ **Student Technician**

at Leatherdale Equine Center.

#### ■ **Test Barn Technician**

Cleary collected samples for drug testing and assisted track veterinarians in caring for injured racehorses at Canterbury Park Race Track.

Now Cleary has set her sights on completing an internship and a residency before trying to specialize more. "I'm kind of torn between internal medicine and surgery right now," she explained. "I hope to do several externships to get a better idea of what would suit me best. If all that goes well, my ideal job would be to work at an academic institution. I'd really like to combine research and clinical practice."

Overall, what Cleary says she loves most about the equine veterinary industry is its vastness and variety. "You can go from Thoroughbreds to Standardbreds to cutting and pleasure horses and get a very different perspective on things," she said. "And it's interesting to see the difference between people racing horses who use them as their livelihood and people that have horses in their backyard for pleasure."

And, of course, once Cleary settles into the veterinary lifestyle, she would love to buy a new horse and try her hand at eventing.

"Kristen is very intelligent, analytical, and extremely hardworking," Wilson summed up. "She is harnessing her many strengths and passion for the horse to excel in her veterinary studies and is quick to take advantage of opportunities to gain further hands-on experience in equine veterinary work and research." 🌟



## The Truth Behind Compounding

JOE MANNING, DVM, MBA

**B**y definition, a compounded product is any drug that has been manipulated outside of its intended form and use as described on its approved label—varying from an addition of flavor to increase palatability to a complete chemical replication. However, illegally compounded products are not subjected to the same rigorous standards as products approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and in most cases little is known about their safety, efficacy, and stability.

### The Value of FDA Approval

FDA approval is the ultimate test for product safety and efficacy and ensures the product is going to better the health and welfare of the horse. To receive FDA approval, a company must prove the following:

- The drug is safe and effective in the specific species in which it will be used;
- The manufacturing process will produce a consistent, quality product from batch to batch; and
- The labeling is accurate and truthful and contains all necessary information to ensure the drug can be used safely and effectively. The label also must include the potential adverse effects of the product.

The FDA continues to monitor the product even after the drug is approved. The manufacturer must continue to demonstrate that the product is safe, effective, produced consistently, and that all advertisements for the product are accurate and truthful.

### When Compounding Goes Wrong

The death of 21 polo ponies in 2009 brought the dangers of using incorrectly compounded products to the forefront of the equine industry. For the horse's sake, it is important this tragic lesson is not forgotten.

Because compounded drugs don't receive FDA approval, it is up to the veterinarian to ensure the final product contains the correct drug and/or concentration. As a result, the veterinarian is at a greater risk for being found liable for adverse events and/or lack of efficacy.

### Less than you Bargained For

Due to a lack of regulatory oversight in manufacturing, some compounded drugs might:

- Contain unsanitary components;
- Differ in strength; or
- Be mixed with other substances that reduce their quality and/or strength.

One example of a problem commonly seen in illegally compounded products is a variation from what the product label says to what the product actually contains. Merck Animal Health conducted a study evaluating the potency of an illegally

compounded formulation of altrenogest (a hormone therapy product used to suppress estrus in breeding and/or performance mares). The study revealed that the illegally compounded product actually contained a lower percentage of altrenogest than the label claimed, and the potency of the altrenogest decreased significantly even

before the expiration date on the label. In comparison, the FDA monitors Regu-Mate closely to ensure the product potency is consistent with the label claim and that the product is effective until the expiration date.

### Compounded Products are not Generic Equivalents

Generic equivalent products are FDA-approved and have been proven to have the same chemical makeup and purity as the pioneer, or name brand, product. Generic equivalents

also have the same dosage form, strength, route of administration, quality, and intended use as the brand name product. As is the case with all FDA-approved products, generic drugs must be manufactured according to the FDA's strict guidelines in federally inspected facilities.

### A Time and a Place

Compounding should be considered only when the horse is suffering or might die if not treated and if there is no FDA-approved treatment option. Veterinarians should secure compounded medications from an approved pharmacy, and the products should be screened routinely for purity and potency. Additionally, only FDA-approved products are backed by the animal health companies that manufacture them. This product support might be lacking if a compounded medication is used.

### Compounding: More Common than you Think

While any equine health product can be compounded, here is a list of a few FDA-approved products that are often illegally compounded:

- Regu-Mate: the only FDA-approved altrenogest
- GastroGard and UlcerGard: the only FDA-approved products for equine gastric ulcer syndrome
- Banamine: the only FDA-approved flunixin meglumine paste formulation
- Adequan and Legend: the only FDA-approved injectable joint products
- Protazil and Marquis: the only FDA-approved EPM treatment options

Ultimately, the health and welfare of the horse are in the hands of those who care for him. It should be a collaborative effort between the horse owner and the veterinarian to ensure the medication the horse receives is safe and effective. 🐾

Joe Manning, DVM, MBA, is an equine technical services veterinarian with Merck Animal Health.



# The INS and OUTS of EXTERNSHIPS

JAMIE O'FLYNN

It is an exciting time to be a student in veterinary medicine, as externship opportunities continue to become more available and better organized. For instance, this year the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) Avenues Career Night and Opportunities in Equine Practice Seminar ([www.oeps.com](http://www.oeps.com), Labor Day) will celebrate a decade of bringing veterinary students and career opportunities together. Many practices strive to develop great externship programs in order to draw a strong application base for their internships. From my perspective as an intern/extern coordinator, here is some information and insight on booking externships, being successful during the externship, and points to consider after the externship.

**Do your homework.** When it comes to externships, all practices have individualized opportunities. Talk with your peers, visit practice websites, and speak with program coordinators. The sooner you start thinking about externships, the easier they will be to organize. Consider multiple one-week externships during the spring and summer breaks of your first and second years of vet school. These will allow you to visit and experience a broad range of practices before your senior year. Also talk to returning senior students; it's a great way to find out about positive externship opportunities. You might even consider booking a summer externship road trip with a classmate: Split the costs, enjoy tourist stops, and complete externships along the way. Spring and summer break externships are usually the quickest to fill up, however, so book six months to a year in advance. As a third- or fourth-year student, narrow your externships down to those practices with compelling internship programs.

**Get your timing right.** A two-week externship should allow you to become familiar with a practice's processes and procedures. However, if your schedule only allows enough time to complete a one-week externship, or the practice you'd like to visit only has a one-week block available, remember that veterinarians are a cohesive group and can network you through the practice in one week. You should know if you are a good fit in that time and the practice should too. Most practices request that you

complete an externship before the internship application deadlines, which fall around Nov. 1 so that decisions can be made before the AAEP internship offer date (before the convention).

**Be professional.** To be successful during an externship, think of the experience as your interview with that practice. Be prepared with a list of questions, being sure to ask the program coordinator what practitioners evaluate during the externship. Check with the program coordinator regarding appropriate attire, and if the practice you visit requests a picture, send a photo that represents you in a professional way. Show initiative by introducing yourself to the team, and inquire about how to best assist them throughout the day. Brush up on the practice's specialty for the time of year you are completing your externship.

Externships do not always provide a lot of hands-on opportunities, given the short time frame you are with a practice. Thus, you can learn a lot by listening, reading up on cases, following up with the veterinarians, and asking questions at appropriate times. It's important to remember that cases seen during your externship are confidential and should not be discussed with other students, professors, practice guests, or practices. Ask the current interns about their experiences, and let the veterinarians know if you're interested in an internship.

**Reflect and follow up.** After the externship, make a list of questions regarding your experience, such as: Did I gain exposure in my area of interest? Was the externship a positive learning experience? Were the current interns receiving mentorship? Did I enjoy my time? Can I envision myself completing an internship at this practice? Make sure to confirm the internship application deadline and find out if an additional externship is required. Remember to send a thank you note or e-mail to the practice after your externship concludes—it's a small gesture that can go a long way. 🍀

Jamie O'Flynn is the intern and extern coordinator at Hagyard Equine Medical Institute, in Lexington, Ky.



## Discovering your Best Externship Opportunity

# HOWto

## Make the Most of Your Summer

SCOTT M. AUSTIN, DVM, MS,  
DIPL. ACVIM

For my generation thoughts of finding a job out of veterinary school waited until fourth year, and most of us could count on multiple job offers. This passive attitude, however, will not work in today's market. New equine veterinarians face one of the most daunting job markets in history. In today's economy horse owners have less money to spend, resulting in fewer veterinary visits, fewer elective procedures, and a significant decrease in horse breeding. Even if the economy recovers tomorrow, veterinary practices will feel the decrease in horse production for years to come. As a result of economic woes, many practices are not planning to hire new veterinarians or have actually downsized their veterinary staff. Concurrently, the number of newly graduated veterinarians that want to practice equine medicine has increased. Here's what I recommend regarding being successful in such a demanding time:

**Recommendation 1: Evaluate your goals.** Where do you want to be in five years, and what must you

accomplish to get there? Are you committed to equine practice? Although graduation might

seem distant, now is the time to develop a marketing plan for yourself. The first step in marketing is to determine what employers want. Potential employers seek candidates with good attitudes, strong work ethic, and good veterinary skills.

In recent years, potential employers have noticed a pervasive lack of veterinary skills among new graduates. As a result of the rapid expansion in veterinary knowledge, more information is crowded into the four-year curriculum at the expense of practical training. New graduates know more and can do less than any other time in veterinary history. Equine practitioners put such a premium on skills that they now rarely consider hiring someone who has not already been in practice or completed an internship.

**Recommendation 2: Improve your veterinary or horsemanship skills.** Obviously, working as a veterinary assistant/technician would be the most direct approach to increase your skill level. Available opportunities can be found on the AAEP Avenues website ([www.aaep.org/avenues\\_program.htm](http://www.aaep.org/avenues_program.htm)). Additionally, most veterinary schools maintain a job and externship opportunity list and offer work-study positions. Work-study roles are an excellent way to find a mentor,



ANNE M. EBERHARDT

**Consider a job that improves your horsemanship skills.**

demonstrate initiative, display critical thinking, and improve communication skills.

If a job in the veterinary field is not available, consider a position that improves horsemanship skills. This is especially important if your passion for horses is relatively new and you need to build your knowledge of and experience with horses. Potential summer jobs might include working as a groom, stable hand, assistant trainer, farrier's assistant, wrangler, or assistant drug tester (for horse shows). If you are unable to find an equine-related job, volunteer at a local clinic, in an equine-assisted activities program, or at a horse rescue.

### Words TO LIVE BY

“ I often have students ask me how I got into equine medicine having not grown up with horses. Many assume you have to have a horsey background in order to be an equine veterinarian. I couldn't disagree more ... I learned more about working around horses by mucking stalls than I ever did sitting in class in veterinary school. I just loved horses and was willing to do whatever it took to learn as much as possible about their behavior, working around them safely, and watching them move. ”

— Betsy Charles, DVM, San Dieguito Equine Group



**Recommendation 3: Be visible in what you do.** It isn't enough just to find a summer veterinary job. You need to impress coworkers and employers with your work ethic and establish relationships that aid your development as an equine veterinarian. Seek out mentors that critically evaluate your skills and teach the art of equine practice. Treat your summer job as an audition for a letter of recommendation or a future internship. Veterinarians rely upon recommendations to determine potential employees' worth, and they pay close attention to how well a reference knows the candidate. Now is the time to develop those relationships. Remember to follow up periodically with your mentors and let them know that you value their contribution to your career.

**Recommendation 4: Learn to be a professional.** Your first impression is


determined by your appearance and attitude. Dress for hard work, but be neat and clean. Give the veterinarians and staff your undivided attention. Turn off your cell phone. Be attentive and ask questions, but don't intrude with questions during the middle of an emergency. Always ask how you can help, clean up after yourself, and remember that no task is beneath you. Treat all employees with courtesy and respect, and always thank the practices and staff for their time. Also look at your social media profile. Do you present yourself in a favorable light for future employers? If not, now is the time to clean up your image.

**Recommendation 5: Be open to change.** Many prospective equine veterinarians have a rigid future plan mapped out. My advice is to be flexible when considering your future. Use your equine practice visits to

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learn about client services that are in demand but not currently available. Practices might be more willing to hire someone with skills and expertise not currently available in their practice. To effectively market yourself as an equine veterinarian, you must offer what the market wants. 

**Scott M. Austin, DVM, MS, Dipl. ACVIM**, is an assistant clinical professor at the University of Illinois' Department of Veterinary Clinical Medicine, in Urbana.

## Dear Veterinary Student,

At Merck Animal Health we believe the future of equine veterinary medicine is bright, and we truly appreciate the role the veterinary student plays in sustaining our industry's future success.

On behalf of the Merck Animal Health equine team, I'm pleased to bring you the first-ever student-exclusive version of the popular equine veterinary newsletter, *Partners in Practice*.

The *NextVet* edition of *Partners in Practice* will be distributed to veterinary students in the spring and fall semesters. The newsletter will be packed with information to help you not only be more successful students but also eventually help you become better veterinarians.

To help ensure we are meeting your expectations of the student edition of *Partners in Practice*, I welcome any ideas, suggestions or comments you might have. Please feel free to contact me directly at [joe.ferraro5@merck.com](mailto:joe.ferraro5@merck.com).

Thank you for your commitment to improving the health and welfare of the horse. We hope you enjoy the first *NextVet* edition of *Partners in Practice* and wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.



Sincerely,  
Joe Ferraro  
Equine Product Manager  
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