

Despite being only at the start of her veterinary career with Synergy Farm Health, **Emily Gascoigne** is now taking the next generation of farm vets on call with her. Here she relates some of her recent experiences in the profession.

The case of the cow and the crumpled gate

As a large farm animal practice in Dorset, we are regularly asked to provide placements for aspiring students or those studying towards their veterinary degree.

Taking students out on calls with you can make the working day even more interesting. As vets we all remember those drives as students. The first drive out is one of setting the goalposts – do the practice vets want to talk or concentrate on their working day? For your part you want to ask questions to appear keen whilst at the same time worrying that they will make you look foolish and ill-studied. It's a minefield.

Then there is the choice of calls. As a practice we encourage our students to 'mix it up'. The routine fertility visits are always the most attractive calls – they usually involve lots of cows, a few sick cows, perhaps a lame one and a look at the calves. As a student, I certainly placed a lot of emphasis on these visits as they are

a fantastic opportunity to learn lots of hands-on skills. But sometimes there is a lot to be learned from the unscheduled visits.

My day began with a student introduction. The student in question was beginning her two-week placement during her vacation from veterinary school.

Blood loss

Having explained the importance of lots of individual cases, we were swiftly sent out on a call to visit a dairy cow which had had a run in with a gate overnight. The farmer was concerned the cow had lost a significant amount of blood and was now shaking. We make our way promptly to the call discussing the clinical possibilities.

I had been to the farm before and the farmer is usually very personable and chatty. On this occasion however, he was very quiet.

"She's over here, looking a bit worse for wear. She must have done it over-night, I wonder if something spooked her."

After establishing the cow

was stable and no longer bleeding, I asked to inspect the 'battle ground'. The gate was in a bad way and no amount of veterinary skill or anything else was about to restore it to its former glory.

There was blood all over the bent gate. Surveying the scene is always useful as it helps you estimate how much blood an animal has lost which can help in formulating your action plan.

This second lactation cow was looking fed up and

her back left leg was battered and bruised and there was a patch of open flesh. She had torn through the skin and one of the tendon portions beneath. It was messy, but despite this, she was standing on the leg quite contently.

To give me an opportunity to examine her, the farmer gave her some concentrates which she ate

heartily – the sign of a fighter. Further examination revealed she was otherwise in good clinical health and her guts were moving as well as



Facts

- ▶▶ Vet students are different from other college students
- ▶▶ It is a challenge to recruit graduates to do farm work
- ▶▶ Most students avoid TB tests – they would rather be seeing clinical cases
- ▶▶ Responsibility to show my practice to the best of my ability.

any healthy cow I have examined.

There was very little to stitch or close and my main concern was keeping the wounds clean while the skin and tendons had time to heal. Infection was a key worry and she was placed on antibiotics and pain relief, complete with matching bandages. The farmer was told how to manage the wounds and how to change bandages.

Supervising a vet student is different again from looking after a college student. I was recently asked to take a college student out on calls and my day was formed of a TB test and a small fertility routine. Most veterinary students avoid TB tests – they would rather be seeing clinical cases and free to help with calvings etc.

In reality, TB testing is an important 'procedure' for new graduates. It utilises certification skills, working for a Government agency, cattle handling, communication skills and being responsible for a team moving potentially unruly cattle. The student in question had never seen a TB test and even the principles of the first injection versus the second injection was all new material for her.

Recruiting veterinary graduates to farm animal discipline is a constant challenge with the majority of students entering small animal medicine. As a practitioner I have a responsibility to show my practice and

profession to the best of my ability and give an honest representation of my working day. Granted it isn't much fun in all the rain we've had recently, and a trip to the local knacker yard for a post-mortem before a Young Farmers' meeting can test your friendships. But not many things beat a live heifer calf after a tricky calving or a lame cow left more comfortable after your treatment.

There are steps in place to maintain the supply of veterinary farm graduates for the future. In light of the 2009 Lowe

Report, emphasis on applicant selection, tailored training and post-university support has been put in place. A student society – Farm Association of Veterinary Students – was established in 2012 to support students at university with an interest in farm medicine.

The Association hosts an annual congress which this year is being held at Bristol. I and some colleagues from Synergy will be heading to the congress. I'm already practising my ceilidh dancing!

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