



JAVMA_{news}

PRACTICE

May 15, 2015

AAHA accrediting internship and mentorship programs

By Katie Burns

Posted April 29, 2015

The American Animal Hospital Association announced in March that it has begun voluntary accreditation of internship and mentorship programs at AAHA-accredited animal hospitals.

The AAHA board of directors approved the standards for internship and mentorship programs in fall 2014. All hospitals going through an AAHA evaluation may select the internship and mentorship standards as optional parts of their evaluation.

As of early April, 44 specialty and three general practices had earned internship accreditation, and four specialty and 16 general practices had earned mentorship accreditation. Five practices had earned both internship and mentorship accreditation.

In 2012, the authors of the *JAVMA* commentary “A call for internship quality control” (*JAVMA* 2012;240:939-942) argued that the AVMA and other veterinary organizations should develop a system of accreditation and oversight for internships. Task forces at the AVMA and AAHA have looked into internship issues, with the AVMA group generating model guidelines and the AAHA group generating accreditation standards.



Dr. Tea Gluhak is completing an internship in surgery at Coral Springs Animal Hospital in Coral Springs, Florida, one of the first practices to earn internship accreditation from the American Animal Hospital Association. (Photo by Jennifer DeAngelis)

The AVMA and AAHA alike have sought to promote mentorship for new veterinary graduates. In 2013, AAHA introduced a Mentorship Toolkit to help practices implement mentorship programs. AAHA created the tools with VetPartners, a practice managers' and consultants' association, and the National Veterinary Business Management Association, an association of veterinary students.

"New graduates, they very much want to continue their training beyond veterinary school," said Dr. Tracey Jensen, 2015-2016 AAHA president. "Opportunities for that training can vary dramatically in their quality."

By accrediting internship and mentorship programs, Dr. Jensen said, AAHA heeded a cry for help from recent graduates who want to know if their expectations for any given program match up with what the program will provide.

Coral Springs Animal Hospital of Coral Springs, Florida, is one of the first AAHA-accredited practices to earn internship accreditation from AAHA. Dr. Lloyd S. Meisels, hospital founder, is a member of the task force that developed the AAHA internship standards.

Dr. Meisels said the practice began its internship program in 1996 to get involved in teaching and to get help covering night shifts. The hospital continues to offer rotating internships. Four years ago, the practice added an internship in surgery and an internship in internal medicine.

"Unfortunately, on the dark side, some programs are just using interns as cheap labor," Dr. Meisels said.

He said internships vary in hours and pay as well as educational approach. Interns at his practice work 55 hours per week, but he has heard tales of interns working 80 to 90 hours per week. His practice pays a salary in the mid-\$30,000s, while the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges found that the mean salary for interns was in the mid-\$20,000s in 2014.

Coral Springs Animal Hospital divides the internship into roughly 60 percent education and 40 percent practice, with interns always under supervision. Dr. Meisels said, "You have to balance the teaching and then at some point break

the umbilical cord, if you will, and let them do some independent thinking.”

Now Dr. Meisels can recommend AAHA accreditation of internship programs as a guide to help veterinarians seek out a quality internship that is likely to meet or exceed their expectations.

To qualify for internship accreditation, an AAHA-accredited hospital must have at least one full-time board-certified veterinarian on staff in charge of supervising interns for each specialty discipline in the internship program. A program administrator should oversee implementation of the program and develop a written plan for the program.

The internship standards call for the practice to provide a written, individualized internship agreement to each intern. The agreement should cover duty hours and on-call responsibilities, number of hours under the direct supervision of a staff clinician, number of hours with credentialed technical support staff available, estimate of primary versus secondary case responsibility, stipend or compensation information, applicable benefits, and specific information regarding any noncompete clauses.

The internship program should incorporate an orientation program, didactic training, support for scholarly activities, intern evaluation, and evaluation of the program by the intern.

To qualify for mentorship accreditation, an AAHA-accredited hospital must define in writing the type of mentoring that the program will use, such as formal, informal, virtual, face-to-face, or a combination of types.

The mentor and mentee should start out by discussing and documenting mutual expectations, boundaries, confidentiality, and accountability of both parties. The mentorship program should include aspects such as a written plan addressing the needs of the practice and mentee, a vision plan with short- and long-term goals, feedback meetings, and use of the AAHA mentoring tools.

Additional information about AAHA accreditation of internship and mentorship programs is available [here](#).

Related JAVMA content:

[Mentorship, internship models evolving to meet needs](#) (May 15, 2014)

[On the rise: Internships under scrutiny as supply, demand continue to increase despite pay, hours](#) (July 1, 2013)

[Toolkit created to encourage mentorships](#) (May 15, 2013)

Copyright © 2015 American Veterinary Medical Association