Shelter Medicine: A Broad Discipline for Diverse Teaching

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Background:
Shelter Medicine is an emerging discipline in veterinary practice. It is concerned with the health and welfare of the unowned population of pet species, both in shelters and the community. Practicing shelter medicine requires the skills and knowledge of general practice, often with constrained resources. In addition it includes examination of demographics and population control, as well as health and welfare in the multi-animal environment. The work of many general practitioner veterinarians includes some shelter medicine, and it is used in the teaching in many UK veterinary schools.

Year of study | Skills | Population health | Welfare and behaviour | Population control | Community engagement and professionalism | Mode of Delivery
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1 | Animal Handling | | Introduction to shelter medicine | | Shelter visit |
2 | Housing, enrichment, handling | | | | Lecture |
2 | Biosecurity, Infectious disease | Workshop |
2 | Animal Handling | Shelter visit |
3 | Varied original research projects over 10 to 12 weeks | Research projects |
3 | Communication | Outbreak management | | | Workshop |
4 | Outbreak management, Health screening and associated decision making | | Prepubertal and paediatric neutering | Animal charity policy | Workshop |
4 | Infectious disease | Lecture |
5 | Clinical skills (History, examination, record keeping), Decision making with limited resources and data | Organisational and housing design (shelter as a patient), Infectious diseases, Biosecurity, Diagnostic testing | Housing, Enrichment, Handling, Behaviour, Welfare in shelters, Neglect and cruelty | Animal charity policy and law | Principles of shelter medicine, Compassion fatigue, Welfare prosecution, Behoming and euthanasia, Reflective practice |
5 | Surgical skills | Shelter visit and Small group teaching in clinical setting |

Challenges:
- Lack of awareness of the scope and transferable skills of Shelter Medicine as a discipline
- Finding space in a full curriculum
- Costs and payment for veterinary services
- High volume and efficiency of service

Benefits of teaching within shelter medicine:
- Meets most primary care day one competences across medicine, surgery, pathology, epidemiology, welfare, and communication.
- Ethical community engagement: activities are for the benefit of the community, rather than a resource to be used.
- Cultural competency when students are of different cultural, class, social or ethnic origins.

Conclusion: Shelter medicine is happening, and teaches lots of core competencies, broadening exposure of students to a variety of practice, alongside population health for small animals.


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