

Motivating factors and barriers which influence veterinary surgeons' views about – and participation in – lifelong learning

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Introduction

With a new Veterinary Surgeons Act imminent, which is likely to make Continuing Professional Development (CPD) a statutory requirement, there is a need to investigate different factors that encourage or deter veterinary surgeons' uptake of continuing education. A better understanding of practitioners' motivation to engage in CPD is critical in determining the need and collective desire of the profession for CPD, and in promoting more effective strategies for developing lifelong learning skills at the undergraduate level.

The present study is the first in the veterinary field to look at the relationship between extrinsic and intrinsic motivating factors for engaging in lifelong learning - and perceived barriers to participation - and individuals' learning orientations (preference for complex or simple learning). It is anticipated that the results of this comprehensive study will equip the profession with the information required to design and provide CPD opportunities that will take into account the diverse requirements of its members, and to lay the foundations for lifelong learning at the undergraduate level.

Materials and methods

A questionnaire was mailed to 2000 veterinary surgeons randomly selected from the RCVS database of home-practising UK graduates from across four decades of graduation since 1967—providing access to 40 years of graduates, comprising the majority of the workforce.

The questionnaire incorporated five sections as follows:

1. About you
 - i.e. gender, age, decade of graduation, employment status, area of employment, and position in the workplace
2. Your views and experience of continuing education
 - i.e. number of hours in the last twelve months spent giving and receiving CPD, time and money provided for CPD, importance of CPD to the profession, preference for different methods of CPD delivery, resources they have access to (e.g. practice library), and when they realised the importance of continuing education
3. Possible reasons for participating in CPD
 - i.e. Likert-scale statements related to extrinsic, intrinsic and social reasons for engaging in CPD
4. Possible barriers to participating in CPD
 - i.e. Likert-scale statements related to timing of events, distance, money, solo practice, stage of career and family demands
5. Approaches to learning
 - i.e. Likert-scale statements related to an individual's preference for complex tasks versus simple tasks

Summary of main results

Results of the study will be discussed in more detail in follow-up publications. What follows is a summary of the main points arising from the data analysis.

- 40.2% of practitioners responded to the questionnaire, of which 775 (38.8%) were included in the analyses.
- There was a varied distribution of responses as to when practitioners realised the importance of continuing education for their professional development (from school to >5 years post-graduation), with the least responses being during 'school'.
- Respondents spent on average 31.5 hours receiving CPD and 2.6 hours giving CPD, although there was widespread variation in each case. The majority of participants were either satisfied with the amount of CPD they are required to undertake, or would like to engage in more CPD.
- The majority of practitioners either do not record their CPD on their RCVS record card or neglect to do this in a consistent manner.
- Most respondents had access to home and work internet and a personal library and journal subscriptions. Access to a professional library was limited to those in university (veterinary school and other departments). Electronic journals were also restricted, with access provided mainly to those in university (veterinary school), and also to those in referral/consultancy and government work.
- Respondents rated most methods of CPD as useful on average, with the exception of practical 'hands on' workshops that were rated as extremely useful. A significant proportion (38.1%) had never used distance learning, but the majority of those that had rated it as useful or not very useful.
- The overwhelming response was positive from respondents to the statement 'CPD is important for my professional development'; however, views were more varied regarding the impact of mandatory CPD on the effectiveness of the profession as a whole.
- On average, employers and employees reported that 5 days (equivalent to the 35 hours required by the RCVS) were allocated by employers for employees' engagement in CPD, however some employees were given less than this or no time off work at all.
- Typical figures for money allocated to employees for CPD in the last 12 months were £500 and £1000, with an average allocation of £835 and £906 reported by employees and employers respectively; however, some employees were given less than this or none at all, and 40% of employees funded at least part of their CPD.
- Most respondents were strongly intrinsically motivated to participate in CPD, somewhat socially motivated, and least motivated for extrinsic reasons.
- The suggested barriers were at least occasionally a problem for the majority of respondents, and these could be divided into:
 - Lack of appropriate CPD at a convenient time and location
 - Lack of workplace support
 - Personal factors (including family commitments)
- Twenty respondents (2.6%) stated that they had a disability or medical condition that restricted their participation in CPD.

- Respondents for the most part occasionally, often or always agreed with statements designed to measure preference for complex tasks; and never, occasionally, or often agreed with the statements designed to measure preference for simple tasks. This overall preference for complexity was shown to be statistically significant. However, caution must be exercised in generalising these results to the wider profession, as those that took the time to respond may be more intrinsically motivated in general than non-responders.
- A number of respondents worry about coping with work properly and drowning in workload. This evidence suggests that the current attention being paid to wellbeing is timely. Hopefully, this will reveal additional evidence about issues with which the profession is struggling, as a basis for positive action towards relieving some of this pressure.
- Overall, a preference for complex tasks was positively correlated with intrinsic motivation to participate in CPD and negatively correlated with barriers. Thus, individuals who are motivated to learn purely out of the desire to acquire knowledge are less likely to perceive barriers to engage in CPD activities. Interestingly, however, a preference for complex tasks was also positively correlated with extrinsic motivation.
- Conversely, a preference for simple tasks was only correlated with barriers. Thus individuals who prefer to learn with minimal effort are more likely to perceive barriers to engaging in CPD activities.
- In addition, a preference for complex learning was positively correlated with ratings of lectures, seminars, practical 'hands on' workshops, formal seminars, distance learning and books/journals articles, which would suggest that all these methods support complex learning in this group of professionals.