

Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine

A Veterinary Student Interviews One Veterinarian about Transitioning into Practice, and Another to Learn about Organized Veterinary Medicine

Editor's Note: Elizabeth Newsom-Stewart is a second-year DVM student at Cornell University who recently interviewed a veterinarian to fulfill her assignment in a class I teach, *Veterinary Medicine: The Versatile Profession*. I chose her paper to reprint here because it speaks cogently to the important issue of whether or not new graduates need to do an internship to feel qualified to enter veterinary practice. Because of Elizabeth's desire to become involved in the leadership of the profession through organized veterinary medicine, she interviewed another veterinarian who has provided leadership at the regional and state levels in New York.

Donald F. Smith

By Elizabeth Newsom-Stewart (Guest Author)

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There are two aspects of the veterinary profession that are important to me: being an excellent clinician who practices high quality medicine and surgery, and being a leader in organized veterinary medicine. Those issues were best addressed by veterinarians in two different stages of their careers; therefore, I interviewed two different women. First, I interviewed Dr. Angela Silva (Indriolo), a 2011 Cornell graduate, and we discussed issues relating to transitioning from the role of a veterinary student into that of a practicing veterinarian. I also interviewed Dr. Linda Tintle, a 1981 Cornell graduate, regarding leadership in organized veterinary medicine.¹

I chose to interview Dr. Silva because, as a relatively recent graduate, I felt that she would have a helpful perspective on how to develop oneself into the best veterinarian possible, especially during the crucial first few years post-graduation. Dr. Silva spent two years as a small animal general practitioner at Bond Animal Hospital, a busy general practice in White Plains. She has now transitioned to a practice that is closer to her home. Dr. Silva is a certified veterinary acupuncturist, is certified in stem-cell therapy, and has completed a course at Colorado State University in client communication, called the FRANK program. Dr. Silva now lives with her husband and two standard poodles in Somers, New York. As I did an externship with her in the past, I know that she is an excellent veterinarian who also maintains a healthy work-life balance, and I therefore felt that she was a perfect person to interview.



*Elizabeth Newsom-Stewart, Cornell DVM Class of 2016
Photo Taken during Rural Area Veterinary Services Rotation²
(Photo provided by Ms. Newsom-Stewart)*

Because I am questioning whether or not to do an internship, I asked Dr. Silva her opinion. She feels that an internship is an appropriate choice if a student does not feel confident enough to practice upon graduation, but she insists that one can become an equally excellent clinician without one. She explained that, for a new veterinarian who really cares about their patients, the first year of practice is “like an internship, with a much higher salary.” By this she meant that a new graduate will need to spend hours every night speaking with specialists and diagnostic laboratories; and doing research in order to provide the best patient care.

The negatives of doing an internship also include that they may not be as relevant to what a general practitioner may encounter. For example, she explained that one of her friends finished an internship “being able to easily formulate a ten-drug treatment plan for kidney failure, but unable to do a cat spay in under an hour.” Interns may also gain little experience in the practicalities of general medicine, such as client financial constraints, client communication, and moving in a “step-by-step manner” that moves with the client’s needs instead of in opposition to them.

Very notable to me was her statement that, “You graduate knowing how to practice good medicine, but not how to work with your clients [towards a common goal].” She explained that client communication is one of the most critical aspects of practice, but is not effectively taught or learned until after graduation. A helpful tip that she gave me was to pursue additional training, such as the FRANK program that her employer, Dr. Aspros, sent her to Colorado State University to obtain.

On a similar note, Dr. Silva also emphasized the importance of mentorship—finding a practice owner who is aware of the challenges faced by new graduates, and who is willing to mentor as needed. Although it seems obvious, many new veterinarians also do not seem to realize how important it is that they find an employer who practices high quality medicine and surgery, because a new graduate will be following most of their practice policies and recommendations for several years. We also discussed issues such as the importance of continuing education, being proactive about honing skills, maintaining a work-life balance, and working well with technicians, staff, and practice owners.

Although interviewing Dr. Silva was extremely helpful for me, I still had questions with another aspect of veterinary medicine; that is, becoming a leader in the veterinary profession as a whole. To that end, I decided to interview Dr. Linda Tintle, founder and owner of a small animal general practice in Wurtsboro, New York. Dr. Tintle is very active in the Hudson Valley Veterinary Medical Society, the New York State Veterinary Medical Society (NYSVMS), and is a past member of the Dean's Advisory Council at Cornell. She is president of the Orange County Animal Emergency Service, and is active in the Shar-pei community, having been involved in research of breed specific disorders and the Chinese Shar-pei Club of America.

My many questions for Dr. Tintle may seem very basic, but I truly did not know the answer. For example, what does being involved in “organized veterinary medicine” actually mean? What, practically, does one do on a daily basis? What is the purpose of the state society? What about the regional society? How does one get involved?

Dr. Tintle was patient and knowledgeable. She described how the regional society is mainly involved in local issues, including continuing education and the addressing of ethical complaints or issues between veterinary colleagues. At a state level, she told me how the state society is essentially a liaison between veterinarians and the New York State government, which establishes laws, policies, and regulations that influence the way veterinarians are permitted to practice. For example, issues regarding the legitimacy of equine dentists, a bill making debarking illegal under any circumstances, and restrictions on having compounded doses in a clinic have a very real effect on veterinarians, and the state society works to make the impact of these laws as minimally detrimental (and hopefully as beneficial) as possible.

The NYSVMS also tries to assist its members in other ways, such as providing health insurance, educating its members on legal matters such as those described above, as well as more managerial issues like hours and employee restrictions. They provide continuing education opportunities through biannual conferences in conjunction with Cornell, and also have run a veterinary accreditation program to help clinics meet the New York State practice standards and abide by all the legislation that applies to them.

Because it is very important to me to be involved in organized medicine, I asked Dr. Tintle how one can go about that as a new graduate. She said that many regional associations are eager to find new people to serve. She explained that there are so few veterinarians interested in being involved that many members remain in the same position for several years out of necessity.

Additionally, she told me of a great program offered by the NYSVMS that is aimed at developing the leadership abilities of new graduates. It is run by the Committee for Leadership Advancement, and essentially helps new graduates transition into leadership roles. The program can also help with other issues facing new graduates. If I practice here in New York, I will absolutely take advantage of that opportunity; if I go elsewhere, I will know what to look for in whatever state I work.

I found both of these interviews to be very helpful, and an excellent opportunity to answer questions that will help me build my career in the future. Mentorship is so important in becoming a great clinician, and in being productive member of the profession as a whole. I will absolutely remember the advice that both women gave me, and put it into action as I move out of the student role into the role of a practicing clinician and member of the national veterinary community.

¹ Tintle, Linda. New York President Challenges the Empire State's Veterinarians. *Perspectives in Veterinary Medicine*. August 25, 2013.

² [Rural Area Veterinary Services](#) provides opportunities for veterinary students to work in underserved areas of the United States.

KEYWORDS:

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TOPIC:

Mentors in Veterinary Medicine
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LEADING QUESTION:

Should new graduates do internships?

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