

An investigation into the confidence levels of veterinary nurses when caring for exotic species

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INTRODUCTION

Due to the increasing popularity of exotics (classified as lagomorph, rodent, reptile or avian species) as pets and the willingness of owners to seek veterinary advice, there is a much higher demand for veterinary nurses to develop their knowledge and clinical skills of these species. An exotic patient's level of care is determined by the level of knowledge the professional holds, therefore to ensure successful treatment, all veterinary staff require an understanding of the basic biology, husbandry and medical parameters of each individual species. Previous research, within human nursing and sport studies, has demonstrated that increased confidence has a positive effect on an individuals' performance.

Research objective: To explore if the veterinary nursing profession has an overall low confidence when dealing with exotic species.

METHODOLOGY

A stratified sampling technique was used by distributing an anonymous survey, with 15 questions, via Survey Monkey® amongst Registered Veterinary Nurses and Student Veterinary Nurses within the UK using the social media website Facebook®. In addition fifty practices were randomly chosen by selecting every 3rd practice from an online directory.

Data collected was both qualitative and quantitative with participants being asked to rate their confidence levels, provide opinions and answer closed ended questions.

Results were analysed using SPSS, including a Kolmogorov-Smirnov test and Friedman's test.

Figure 1: How would you rate your knowledge of basic medical care for each of the following species? (1 being least confident and 5 being most confident)

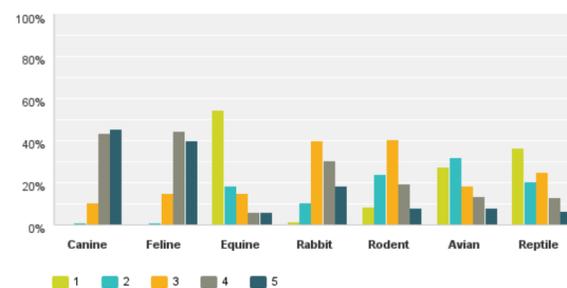


Figure 3: Do you think there is adequate training for student veterinary nurses on the care of exotic patients?

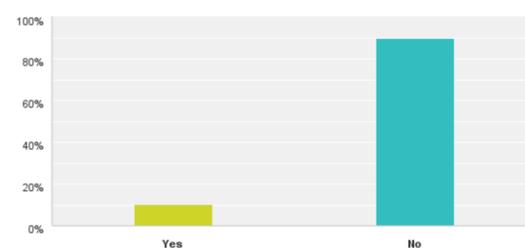


Figure 2: How would you rate your knowledge of anaesthesia for each of the following species? (1 being least confident and 5 being most confident?)

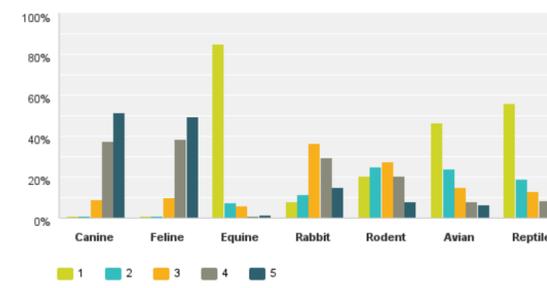
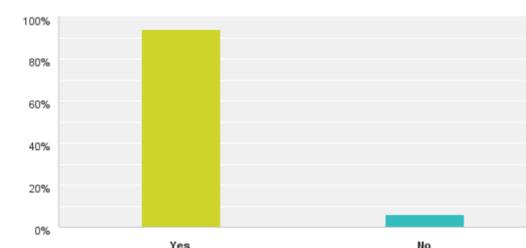


Figure 4: Do you feel patient welfare could be compromised by a lack of education on exotic species?



RESULTS

A total of 256 participants completed the survey (registered veterinary nurses: n=144; student veterinary nurses: n=112).

The results from the statistical tests demonstrate a significant difference between confidence levels in feline and canine nursing compared to that in exotics species ($P < 0.001$). (See Figures 1 and 2).

94.1% (n=241) of veterinary nurses thought there was inadequate training available on exotic species. (See Figure 3).

94.1% (n=241) felt patient welfare could be compromised due to a lack of education on exotic species. (See Figure 4).

CONCLUSIONS

The results from this study demonstrate a lack of confidence in Veterinary Nurses when dealing with exotic species. The results suggest that changes may be required to the syllabus to increase the levels of care that exotic species receive. Veterinary Nurses should also attend appropriate CPD events to ensure their skills and knowledge are relevant to the species they are caring for.