

CVMA's National Examining Board - Maintaining Standards of Practice and Education

The National Examining Board (NEB) is an extremely important organization within the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA), which is often misunderstood, maligned, belittled, or ignored completely. Many think about the NEB only as the body that examines the graduates of Canada's veterinary colleges in order that they may apply for a license to practice in whatever jurisdiction they wish. It is much more than that, although the administration of the North American Veterinary Licensing Examination (NAVLE) is its most visible role.

For example, the NEB is a full partner in the veterinary college accreditation program of the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) Council on Education (COE). Furthermore, in conjunction with various United States counterparts, it has participated in the development of the NAVLE, the Clinical Proficiency Examination (CPE), and the standards for accreditation of North American veterinary colleges.

One of the objectives set out in the CVMA charter was the establishment of "an examining board to examine candidates for admission to the veterinary profession and to grant certificates of qualifications." However, each provincial association had its own standards for licensing and it was not until 1955 that the CVMA Council supported the recommendation of its Education Committee that a National Examining Board be established. By 1985, 7 provinces had concurred on common standards outlined in a reciprocity agreement that transferred responsibility for licensing exams from the provinces to the NEB.

Today, the NEB's functions are interrelated and, in essence, all have to do with the competency of individuals applying for a license from the appropriate licensing body. Graduates of any veterinary faculty in the world that is recognized by the government of the country in which the school is situated must pass the NAVLE. It is a written examination comprising 360 multiple-choice questions administered by computer. It measures the entry-level general knowledge base of candidates in the various scientific disciplines required in veterinary medicine, and it requires 1 full day to complete.

Graduates of colleges that have not been granted accreditation under the COE's purview must further demonstrate that they have been trained to North American entry-level standards by successfully completing the NEB's practical exam. The CPE is a "hands-on" examination of a candidate's medical and surgical skills; it is administered at all 4 Canadian veterinary schools pursuant to a comprehensive set of standards and guidelines. It assesses a candidate's ability to handle actual clinical and diagnostic problems in a veterinary hospital setting and to effectively communicate relevant messages.

The CPE requires 4 or more days to complete, including the examination and treatment of live animals and the performance of laboratory procedures. It is a rigorous exercise

consisting of 7 sections with a total of 23.5 hours of exam time. The sections are Anesthesia, Clinical and Anatomic Pathology, Equine Practice, Food Animal Practice, Radiology, Small Animal Practice, and Surgery. As examples of content, during the Surgery section, a candidate prepares, performs, and closes an elective canine ovariohysterectomy, while a candidate for the Anesthesia section is charged with the induction, maintenance, and recovery of the animal. The total time allowed for both sections is 4 hours.

During the 2.5-hour Equine Practice section, candidates perform a physical exam of a clinical case, including the oral cavity and lameness, as well as clinical techniques such as injections and taking a blood sample. The Food Animal Practice section, which is of 3 hours' duration, involves the bovine, porcine, ovine and/or caprine species; the assessment of clinical skills pertaining to the detection and prevention of diseases in animal populations; and the efficient management of food animal production units.

With regard to the accreditation of veterinary schools, the COE's process involves thorough consultation with faculties, submission of a college self-evaluation report, a full site visit, and the exchange of further information, as warranted. In order to be granted accreditation, a college of veterinary medicine must satisfy 11 standards. These standards can be summarized briefly as:

1. Organization
2. Finances
3. Physical Facilities and Equipment
4. Clinical Resources
5. Library and Information Resources
6. Students
7. Admission
8. Faculty
9. Curriculum
10. Research Programs
11. Outcomes Assessment

The details of the 11 standards can be found in the "Accreditation Policies and Procedures of the AVMA Council on Education" July 2004.

When a veterinary college in Canada is visited, the NEB appoints 3 representatives to a COE site visit team, and when an American or overseas college is visited, the NEB appoints 1 team member. A full site visit typically requires 5 days. The NEB is responsible for the expenses incurred by its appointees participating in site visits, as well as its representative to attend regularly scheduled COE meetings.

The accreditation program was initiated to ensure uniform standards of education throughout North America. It has proven to be so successful in maintaining and improving the standards that there are now 6 veterinary faculties outside Canada and the United States that have been granted full accreditation status. For the past 2 years, the

CVMA and the AVMA have participated in discussions with the veterinary profession in Mexico with the goal of helping its veterinary education system to achieve uniformity across that country and, ultimately, attain North American standards.

As can be appreciated, the mandate of the NEB is multifaceted and complex. It must satisfy the needs of the provincial licensing boards in terms of administering licensing exams of the highest quality to ensure recipients of its Certificate of Qualification meet the entry-level standards expected of veterinarians wishing to obtain a license. It plays an important role in the ongoing development and enhancement of the NAVLE and the CPE. At the same time, the NEB is an important contributor to the accreditation of veterinary colleges in Canada, the United States, and overseas.

Canadian veterinarians should take pride in the fact that the CVMA has taken a leadership role in developing and continually refining the very high educational standards that are in place. The education received by the graduates of 4 Canadian veterinary colleges is second to none in the world, thanks in large part to the accreditation process in which all 4 colleges participate. The NAVLE assures that all successful candidates have academic knowledge consistent with North American entry-level requirements, and the CPE allows evaluation of the basic clinical skills required for an entry-level position in clinical practice in Canada. These entry-level benchmarks should provide the provincial licensing bodies with the tools they need to maintain Canada's nationwide high standards of veterinary competence.

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