



Mentoring Guidelines

Introduction

Mentoring relationships occur frequently in the veterinary profession. Such relationships, usually informal, and between senior and junior colleagues, are invaluable in providing advice, support and encouragement to less experienced veterinarians, or those experiencing difficulties.

These guidelines deal with those more formal situations where the Veterinary Council or one of its Committees has recommended or requires a veterinarian to establish a mentoring relationship.

What is mentoring?

Council initiated mentoring is a supportive and collegial relationship between two veterinarians. Mentoring provides a structured forum for regular, dedicated time for in-depth reflection on professional practice and issues which may impact on practice. It is an exchange between colleagues with the main goal being to develop and/or maintain professional skills and competence.

Mentoring is not supervision. Supervision is a different process which under the Veterinarians Act is defined as “the monitoring of, and reporting on, the performance of a veterinarian by another veterinarian”.

Mentoring relationships may be established by Council or its Committees in the following situations:

- Health impairment – where a health condition has been or has the potential to affect a veterinarian’s fitness to practise. In such circumstances it is common for undertakings to be made with the veterinarian that protect the public and at the same time enhance the veterinarian’s rehabilitation. Mentoring relationships can assist in the recovery/rehabilitation process and provide support in times of stress
- Where the Complaints Assessment Committee has identified performance or conduct concerns and enters into an undertaking with the veterinarian to address these concerns
- Competence – where a competence assessment has found that a veterinarian’s performance does not meet the required standard and remediation is required a mentor can be appointed to assist the veterinarian over a specified period to overcome identified deficiencies of knowledge and assure the public interest is protected. A mentor can also be appointed prior to a competence assessment taking place to assure the public interest is protected and help the veterinarian address the identified deficiencies.

- Discipline – where the Council's Judicial Committee requires remediation of a veterinarian who has appeared before the Committee on professional misconduct charges and the knowledge or behavioural deficiencies displayed would be amenable to peer support and guidance

The mentor

According to the Concise Oxford Dictionary a mentor is an “experienced and trusted advisor”. That is exactly the role that Council appointed mentors should play.

The mentor is usually a local veterinarian who is respected by his or her peers and who can provide objective, non judgmental and confidential advice, support, and encouragement to the veterinarian concerned.

A mentor is a good listener and a teacher/ advisor who leads through guidance and example and who can keep their relationship with their mentee on a friendly, but professional, basis.

Successful mentoring relationships involve very open, honest and equal communication and regular interaction between the mentor and the mentee over time.

How is the mentor appointed?

In circumstances where the Veterinary Council requires or recommends a veterinarian to establish a mentoring relationship, the mentor is identified by:

- the Veterinary Council in consultation with, and the agreement of, the mentee; or
- the prospective mentee who seeks the Council's approval of the proposed mentor

What is the mentor's role?

The Council provides the mentor with background information about the mentee.

Every mentorship is an individual one, so the following list is not prescriptive. Rather it provides in a general way, a few areas in which guidance and support might be usefully incorporated into a mentoring relationship:

- discussion of the effects on the veterinarian's individual situation, both personal and professional
- how the veterinarian deals with work related issues/problems - issues with colleagues, staff or clients, or the handling of individual cases
- development of skills in reflective practice
- re-evaluation of professional and personal boundaries
- personal and health issues - advice, insight into problems
- involvement with the profession including continuing professional development activities
- long and short term career directions
- encouragement to comply with any conditions required by/recommendations of, the Council
- reporting requirements to Council

Mentors are provided with additional generic information on the mentoring process. Refer to University of Otago Mentoring Handbook, 2008

Does the mentor report to the Council?

To build trust and rapport the interactions between the mentor and mentee should normally be regarded as confidential.

However:

- all mentors must report immediately to Council in circumstances where they have reason to believe that their mentee's health status, conduct or performance may be adversely impacting on the public interest
- the Council may require the mentor to report on progress after a specified time has transpired or at regular intervals. The particular requirements will be set out in the individual mentoring relationship.

The reporting requirements need to be discussed and clarified at the first mentoring meeting.

Overall goals

By end of the mentoring period, the veterinarian (mentee) should:

- have successfully resolved the immediate issues that required intervention from the Veterinary Council
- have reviewed their practice so that there are reduced risks of similar situations arising in the future
- have well-developed habits of reflective practice
- be making good use of collegial supports
- have sufficient professional awareness to be able to identify areas of risk as they arise in future practice.

Payment for mentors

Although mentors often do not expect or seek payment, they are encouraged to do so.

On submission of a claim form, they are paid by the Council at the current Council member rate, on the understanding that:

- individual mentoring sessions are normally restricted to one hour, with up to one hours preparation/ follow up time (ie 2 hours in total)
- the frequency of paid mentoring sessions will be in accordance with the Council requirements - normally monthly and not more than once a week, unless approved by Council

The mentee is expected to meet the cost of the mentoring, but payment can be delayed in circumstances of financial difficulty.

It is inappropriate for any financial arrangement to be made direct between the mentee and the mentor. Therefore the veterinarian being mentored is invoiced following receipt of the mentor's claim.

It should be noted that the collegial support provided within the mentoring relationship enables some veterinarians to continue working who would be otherwise unable to practise.

Frequency of meetings

A meeting should be arranged as soon as possible after the mentorship is established. At that initial meeting it is useful to discuss reasons why a mentoring relationship has been deemed appropriate.

The frequency of meetings and length of the mentoring relationship will depend on individual circumstances and/or Council requirements. (It is normal for mentoring to last around 18 months).

Mentors are asked to make firm arrangements for the next meeting with the mentee prior to concluding the present one.

Advice

Further information and advice is available from the Council's Registrar: 04 473 9600 or registrar@vetcouncil.org.nz