Supporting students with innovative clinical skills teaching

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The University College Dublin School of Veterinary Medicine’s Clinical Skills Centre (CSC) plays a vital role in curriculum development, practical teaching and skills improvement and assessment. The CSC supports students in progressing towards day-1 competence, with a focus on continuous innovation and excellence in clinical skills teaching. In this article, we highlight a number of initiatives undertaken in the CSC over the last year.

New Canine Otoscopy Model
As part of our focus on day-1 skills development, we continue to create new models in our CSC. One new model is our canine ear examination model. Examination of the ear is an essential day-1 skill. Before attempting this in a clinical setting, it is important that students have performed the procedure in a simulated setting. This enhances their preparation for the clinical setting, positively impacting their developing competence, confidence, and patient welfare. Our model consists of a canine ear, ear canal and an interchangeable bead at the level of the tympanic membrane. In Spring 2023, we engaged students as partners in the co-creation of a student-centered teaching session using this new model and harnessed their feedback to refine the model and teaching approach. Our CSC continues to develop and support opportunities for students to progress towards day-1 competence through simulation of day-1 clinical skills.

Flipped Classroom for Clinical Skills Teaching
In 2023 we introduced a new approach to clinical skills teaching harnessing a flipped classroom approach and a cyclical-station method. The rationale for this change was 2-fold; 1) to drive students to prepare more before arriving to class; 2) to shift the focus of student-instructor interactions from demonstration of skills to providing feedback on already practiced skills. Students were required to access digital resources in advance, covering topics like asepsis, phlebotomy, medicine administration, and suturing. Classes utilized low-cost, easily reproducible models which were created in-house. Multiple instructors supported the learning experience with a greater focus on giving individual feedback on already practiced skills as a result of pre-class preparation. This approach will be further developed and evaluated in the 2023–2024 academic cycle.

Integrating Outreach and Education
The Dublin Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals serves as an invaluable adjunct to traditional university teaching. It offers hands-on, real-world experience in client communications, animal handling, preventative and population medicine and diverse clinical cases, including surgery. Exposure to ethical considerations, collaboration with multidisciplinary teams and community engagement enriches student understanding of the scope of veterinary medicine and the spectrum of care. It provides a unique opportunity for the development of practical skills, compassion, and advocacy, while preparing students for the multifaceted challenges of veterinary practice. Integrating a shelter experience with referral hospital teaching creates a balanced education, harnessing learned and simulated clinical teaching into live practice and enriching students’ adaptability to varied client backgrounds. This practical experience not only supports the development of day-1 clinical competence but plays a pivotal role in the student journey to becoming competent, responsible, and socially aware professionals.