Colleague's Connection

How I Stumbled Upon Aquatic Veterinary Medicine

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(Student Member, The Ohio State University – DVM 2013)

I first developed an interest in veterinary medicine after a few years in the horse world. I helped an equine vet occasionally during his visits to the barn where I rode horses and gradually started paying closer attention to what he was doing. After expressing an interest in veterinary medicine during high school, I was invited to participate in a Veterinary Explorers Program at a local animal hospital. That led to additional shadowing which blossomed my interest in small animal medicine and orthopedics. Next thing I knew I was working at the local clinic getting a taste of general practice. I continued working there over the summers throughout my undergraduate studies and decided that veterinary medicine was what I wanted to do as a career.

Before I knew it, I was starting at The Ohio State University College of Veterinary Medicine, answering “small animal” to the daily question of what I wanted to do with my DVM. During the first quarter of my first year I attended a lecture by Dr. Luke Heider on consumer issues related to agriculture in our epidemiology course. About half way through his presentation a slide came up with the word “aquaculture” on it. I remember being intrigued, never before hearing that term in veterinary medicine. Interested in this new concept, I started to research aquaculture, reading everything I could get my hands on. I eventually approached the state veterinarian and asked him if there was a fish vet I could shadow for a day.

It turns out there was not a vet specializing in fish health in the area but instead I was offered an internship at the Ohio Department of Agriculture’s Aquaculture Department. I spent the summer between first and second year traveling Ohio visiting with fish farmers and learning about their operations, the challenges they faced, and the questions they had. I began to look for additional opportunities to gain experience with fish and learn about the industry I was starting to explore. Fortunately I was able to arrange some great experiences during my second summer break.

During the first part of the summer I interned in Mississippi at the Thad Cochran National Warmwater Aquaculture Center. This internship provided my first exposure to clinical aquatic veterinary medicine. It was fascinating to work in the Aquatic Diagnostic Lab. I cannot thank Dr. Lester Khoo and his staff enough for their tremendous patience and so diligently working to provide a great learning experience. When I wasn’t watching the workup of clinical cases I was in the lab honing my molecular techniques by participating in a validation of a Real Time PCR assay for . It was a phenomenal experience and led to the realization aquatic veterinary medicine was the career for me.

After Mississippi, I spent the rest of my summer break in Idaho working for the Department of Fish and Game. During my eight weeks there I traveled more than 9,000 miles with fish pathologist Doug Munson. I was able to participate in multiple disease surveillance programs during the Chinook salmon spawning and do diagnostic work at various hatcheries. Learning about the extensive efforts that go into rearing salmon and trout was an eye-opening experience.

As I finished up the summer and returned to Columbus for my third year of vet school, I started planning the rotations for my clinical year. This option allows students with specialized career paths to design their own clinical year in consultation with a faculty advisor. I am very fortunate this is part of the curriculum at OSU as it enabled me to better explore aquatic veterinary medicine; an opportunity that would not have been an option at many other veterinary schools.

I am now in the middle of my clinical year and have had the great fortune of participating in externships related to fish health at the Norwegian School of Veterinary Science and Havbruksstjenesten AS in Norway; Marine Scotland, University of Stirling, and Fish Vet Group in Scotland; Vet Aqua International in Ireland; and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Italy. This fall I will be in Idaho again for an internship at Clear Springs Foods. Next spring I will be with USDA APHIS in Ruskin, FL and Riverdale, MD. I am very appreciative to all those who have graciously hosted me thus far and look forward to continuing my experiences as I head toward graduation in May 2013.

It has been quite a journey these past three years. I have been amazed and humbled at how welcoming and helpful all those in aquatic veterinary medicine have been. I have learned a great deal about the industry in the past three years and continue to get more excited about the field. I look forward to exploring the many possibilities for a career in aquatic veterinary medicine available after graduation.