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Survey of teaching methods for small animal anaesthesia to undergraduate veterinary students in Australia and New Zealand

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Teaching veterinary anaesthesia skills to undergraduate veterinary students varies within and between institutions. The aim of this study was to document and describe the approaches to teaching certain veterinary anaesthesia skills in eight Australian and New Zealand veterinary schools.

An anonymous online 55 question survey was distributed to educators at these schools to collect data on the methods of teaching selected subjects. The questions were related to (1) appropriate selection and use of anaesthetic breathing systems, (2) methods of endotracheal intubation and manual ventilation, (3) intra-operative monitoring and (4) management of hypotension during anaesthesia. Data were analysed in Microsoft Excel and reported as descriptive statistics.

Twenty-three unique responses were received (64% from specialists in veterinary anaesthesia, 20% from people who have completed a specialist training program, 12% from anaesthesia membership holders and 4% from those with no formal post graduate training in veterinary anaesthesia). The most clinically relevant responses in the four subject areas were: (1) 36% taught that non-rebreathing systems suit animals <5 kg and 36% did not have a rigid rule, (2) 100% taught the use of laryngoscopes for intubation and 68% use mannikins for training (3) 54% taught that Doppler values represent systolic blood pressure and 46% taught that the value is the mean, 50% choose capnography as the highest priority monitoring device (4) the initial management of intra-operative hypotension consistently involved assessment of depth of anaesthesia, increasing the heart rate and administering fluid therapy. 44% of respondents reported that their institution lacked a standardised approach to teaching these skills.

These results highlight a need to establish a consistent teaching framework, thus ensuring competency in veterinary graduates. These data can be used as a resource for identifying areas with discrepancies, which will guide development of a standardised curriculum for teaching anaesthetic skills.