IndexVET - a database for the practising veterinarian

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Information - knowledge - understanding

Practising as a veterinarian is practising a service trade. This means the customer or client (or maybe the patient) is the matter of concern. Librarians are in the business of ‘information logistics’.

Food chain of information

Research can be divided in categories:
- Basic research
- Applied research
- and the last step that puts science to use is the knowledge of the practical performers of a profession.

That is why the communication of information to the practising veterinarians is of so big importance. Knowledge enables us to make decisions and to get the most reliable results out of our decisions and activities. Information could be described as ‘communication that if the receiver is motivated and has the basis can impart knowledge’. Knowledge plus experience plus reflection may give rise to understanding or realisation. But it is not always that understanding is basis for our possibilities and abilities. An example from the veterinary sphere: it is 200 years ago Jenner first time vaccinated without having any idea of the immune system. Maybe we, the practising veterinarians, can be too clever.

- Peter C. Doherty, until now our only veterinary Nobel-Prize receiver has said that specialisation is in risk to do veterinarians stupid. The huge amount of knowledge that is expected from the specialist restricts creativity and own thinking.
- or with Theodore Roszak: if you exaggerate the importance of information you underestimate your own experience and use more and more time glancing into the computer trying to squeeze information from it. The right way to educate oneself is to reflect on own experience.
- Someone said: information is not knowledge is not understanding.
- Another: Reading drives out thinking - bad news for librarians.
What to know

Knowledge can be differentiated in some major sorts:
- Understanding of basic principles
- Active knowledge
- Detailed knowledge of common topics
- And last, as the safety net: The possibility of finding more specialised information
- when requested

Sources of information

Sources of information for the veterinarian are many for example:
- articles in journals
- proceedings from meetings and conferences
- writings with facts and practical information
- handbooks
- personal communication, lessons, conferences etc.
- The three first are of interest in this connection

Types of articles
- the scientific article - communicating results of research
- review articles - that resumes the ‘state of the knowledge’ on a specific topic
- Case stories - communicating interesting cases, their handling and results.
- Observations - describing new or unusual cases.

The first category is often too specific to be of interest to the practitioner.
The review article is the most important source to secure that one’s knowledge is updated and correct. Case stories and observations acts as supplement to own experiences.

Databases

Most scientific databases hold only, or almost only, strictly scientific articles. Because of that, these databases are of minor use and interest for practitioners.

IndexVET

I am not an information specialist - I am an information consumer. I share with most other people the need of finding relevant information when it is requested. Ten years ago the personal computer reached a stage of development where it became practical usable. Then I started to develop the structure and to collect the material to fill into a database intended for myself and for my colleagues, the Danish practising veterinarians. This resulted in a ‘infobase’ (infobase is the name used by the database program Folio Views). I call the infobase: ‘indexVET’.
The problem

Nobody can be updated on every aspect of veterinary science. Journals hold a huge amount of information of current interest and these information are kept up to date. But most articles are not remembered and if you remember them you do not remember where and when. Lots of papers are floating over the veterinarians’ desktop of which a high proportion is expected to be read and remembered. I do not only think of journals and laws and rules from official or semi-official departments but also advertisements about news, drugs or equipment. Active knowledge should be easily checked out. That makes it essential to be able to find the relevant information when you need it to solve a current problem.

The solution

The computer and its ability to save, sort and serve data make it a unique tool in the distribution of information. I subscribe to a number of relevant journals of which a number are mentioned in my abstract. From these journals all articles relevant to a practising veterinarian are included. All material passing over my desk is evaluated. If it is or in the future can be relevant it is included in indexVET.

The sources are the following:
- Professional journals mostly Danish, Swedish and Norwegian
- A few international journals e.g. Compendium on Continuing Education
- Proceedings from meetings and conferences
- Essential laws concerning veterinary services.
- Information from Danish institutes and authorities.
- A section on toxicology

All records are provided with bibliographic data. Some sources are abstracted some are in full text. All records are grouped into one or more groups. A search can in that manner be limited to a well-defined topic or journal.

Menus
A system of menus based on the groups is applied to facilitate the navigation in the database.

Category - codes
For a short time I worked with keywords but soon I realised the difficulties. Instead a system of category-codes was developed. All records are provided with a category code that describes the topic of that record.

The code is in three letters:
1. species of the animal e.g. e for horse (equus)
2. the organ system of concern e.g. r for respiratory system
3. the causal relation e.g. b for bacteria or t for trauma

That means: a search on code /erb finds all records about respiratory problems in horses caused by bacteria. The record is also marked with /exx saying that the article is about horses, and marked with /erx meaning respiratory problem in horses. In that way a search can be narrowed or widened after needs.
Demonstration

Examples of searches:
- One morning I am called by one of my clients asking me to draw a blood sample from his cow. He says: “you know, for that genetic problem with blonde D’aquitaine”. It is true to say that I don’t remember much about that topic. I search first: blonde, and find articles about genetic problem. Next I try to search: chromosome and find in SVS a name and telephone number for the person who makes the analysis.
- A dog owner makes plans for a journey to Italy with his dog. In the section of laws - travel with dogs and cats - Italy, I find the rules.
- A dog bleeds from the mouth why I want to brush up my knowledge about DIC. A search on dic gives only a few hits and none from CCE. I block ‘disseminated intravascular coagulation’ and CCE comes up.
- Many Cavalier King Charles spaniels get problems with the heart. A search on cavalier finds relevant articles.
- Heart worm: hcp
- Looking in my microscope on a sample of blood from a cow suddenly a parasite moves around in the plasma. I know what babesia looks like but this one I have not the slightest idea of. I look in IndexVET cattle, blood, parasite /bbp, and besides articles about babesia SVT has an article about Trypanosoma theileria; the front page of the journal is decked with a lifelike drawing.
- I want some informations concerning ‘PRRS’. A search finds 78 records.

Marketing, distribution

IndexVET is marketed and distributed by a publisher, GadJura. It is updated four times a year, and is distributed on diskettes. If anyone should dare to ask that question: has IndexVET been a commercial success, the answer is - no. My colleagues has until now shown the program a very modest interest.