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Allied veterinary professional engagement with continuing professional development in Aotearoa / New Zealand, 2017–23

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Abstract

Continuing professional development (CPD) has an important role in the career development and job satisfaction of the allied veterinary professional (AVP) following completion of formal study. Additionally, all registered AVPs in Aotearoa / New Zealand are required to complete a minimum level of CPD to maintain this registration. While registration is currently voluntary, it may become compulsory in the future, increasing demand for accessible CPD that meets the needs of AVPs. This study surveyed AVPs in 2017 and 2023 to gauge levels of engagement and identify barriers to accessing CPD. The first survey revealed that respondents tended to engage in conferences or seminars; the second showed a preference for shorter CPD events online. This shift in engagement could be attributable to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions limiting access to face-to-face CPD; however, lower levels of employer support were also noted in the second survey, with insufficient funding and time allocation being the two most common barriers cited. It is our contention that further investigation into barriers to engagement with CPD and how these might be mitigated may aid in addressing current staff shortages in the veterinary sector.

Keywords

Continuing professional development, CPD, allied veterinary professionals, AVP

Introduction

The veterinary sector comprises a range of roles, including qualified veterinarians, veterinary nurses, veterinary technicians and animal healthcare workers; however, additional staff may work in a clinic without any formal animal healthcare qualifications. This study focuses on the role of continuing professional

development (CPD) for veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians as allied veterinary professionals (AVPs) as defined by the Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council of New Zealand (AVPRC), the regulatory body that maintains the register of AVPs. CPD is a term that refers to ongoing learning to meet needs of professionals and their employers that builds upon formal study to advance and enhance practice – the term is sometimes

interchangeable with ‘lifelong learning’ (Manley et al. 2018; Ryan 2003).

AVPs have evolved from a population of individuals working in veterinary clinics with little to no formal training or qualifications to individuals with formal qualifications who work collaboratively and may undertake ongoing training following graduation (Kinnison et al. 2014). In Aotearoa / New Zealand, with the introduction of voluntary registration for AVPs in 2014, the advanced veterinary profession has become more aligned with that of human nurses. Voluntary registration brought with it a need to undertake a minimum level of CPD, which until 2023 involved completing 20 points of CPD per calendar year, with one hour equating to one point.

In January 2024 the Aotearoa / New Zealand model was changed to a reflective continuing professional development (RCPD) model by the AVPRC, requiring 40 hours of RCPD every two years. This model includes a component of self-assessment and identification of CPD benefits to the AVP’s role (Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council 2024b). Any relevant CPD is accepted, providing benefits can be demonstrated by the registered AVP via documented reflective practice. Such documentation may be recorded using a model such as that developed by Gibbs or Driscoll, or a template provided by the AVPRC (Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council 2024b). Aside from maintaining registration for AVPs, CPD – reflective or otherwise – plays an important role in demonstrating professional competency and career progression (Ryan 2003); however, challenges exist in determining how CPD can be integrated into practice with relevance and meaning (May & Kinnison 2015).

This study sought to answer two questions: Firstly, what was the level of engagement in types of CPD by AVPs based in Aotearoa / New Zealand? Secondly, what were the common barriers to AVP engagement in CPD? The aim was to develop an overall picture by describing characteristics of CPD engagement among survey respondents. This study carried out a comparative analysis of samples in 2017 and 2023, and by comparing these two datasets, we sought to understand changes in the way AVPs engaged with CPD over this period.

This data may be useful to organisations working with AVPs, including membership groups such as the New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA) and regulatory bodies such as the AVPRC, towards improving engagement levels. Although currently voluntary, registration for AVPs is likely to be made compulsory in the future (Allied Veterinary Professional

Regulatory Council of New Zealand 2024a), and with this, meeting CPD targets, highlighting the need to better understand how AVPs engage with CPD.

Method

An anonymous, incentive-free online survey was emailed directly to all veterinary clinics in Aotearoa / New Zealand (n=499) and disseminated via relevant groups on Facebook. The more common terms ‘veterinary nurse’ and ‘veterinary technician’ were used in promotional material, the AVP acronym being relatively new. Respondents were eligible to participate if they were over 18 years of age, and either a student undertaking formal study to become an AVP, or an existing AVP. It was not possible to verify this information following data collection due to the survey’s anonymity; and because we did not collect the IP addresses of respondents, our ability to identify duplicates was also limited.

Students were included in this cohort as the study gathered information about AVPs’ future CPD plans. Prospective respondents were provided with an information sheet before the survey, and could leave at any time with no penalty, and return to previous questions to edit responses. The survey was first conducted in 2017 using SurveyMonkey and in 2023 using Qualtrics SAP (2023), and both were open for four weeks. The second survey was carried out so trends or variance in the data could be identified.

The survey was based on a 2015 survey carried out by the NZVNA on CPD, with additional questions added to obtain further information regarding clinic size, clinic type (small animal, mixed, large animal or equine) and demographics. More specific questions about support for and barriers to CPD were also asked, with a selection of options provided including an ‘Other’ category that was a free-text field. The surveys conditionally displayed a selection of subsequent questions based on previous responses, primarily in questions related to the level of engagement with CPD and knowledge around employer policies.

Minor revisions were made in the 2023 survey to seek greater clarity in responses. Additional categories were added to the question on topics of interest for CPD based on responses given in the ‘Other’ category in the 2017 survey, with Clinic Management, Dermatology and Fluid Therapy being added. Questions on attendance at the annual NZVNA conference were omitted from the 2023 survey due to Covid-19 restrictions preventing a

2022 NZVNA conference. The survey was pre-tested on a small group of veterinary nurses and discussed with a statistician known to the lead author prior to dissemination. A CHERRIES checklist (Eysenbach 2004) was carried out to improve quality of e-survey reporting.

Some respondents may have completed both surveys, but because this was not a requirement, information on this point was not collected in 2023. In total, 215 responses were returned in 2017, and 168 responses in the 2023 survey. With a population of 2,145 veterinary nurses in Aotearoa / New Zealand (Careers.govt.nz 2024), this represented 10.02% of population in 2017, and 7.83% in 2023. A power analysis on the population recommended a sample size of 326 to provide a 95% confidence interval, with a 5% margin of error. Of the 2017 surveys, 23 were incomplete, and nine were incomplete from the 2023 survey. Data from incomplete surveys was used where it did not affect correlational statistical analysis.

The same survey was used for 2017 and 2023 (excepting the minor changes previously noted) and consisted of four sections – three focusing on questions related to CPD, and one that collected demographic information about each respondent and their employment. Demographic data collected included location, age, gender, ethnicity, salary range and qualifications. The type of clinic (small animal, mixed practice, equine, emergency/after hours, specialist/

referral) was also identified. The sections on CPD addressed areas of interest, the level of engagement (both in the 12 months prior to the survey, and their plans for the following year), and the barriers to CPD that each respondent felt existed for them.

Following data collection, results were imported into Microsoft Excel for analysis. Descriptive and regression statistical analyses were used to describe data characteristics, including mean, median and correlation.

Results

Demographics

The majority of respondents for both surveys were female (2017: 80.09%, n=169; 2023: 95.21%, n=159) and were qualified with a Diploma in Veterinary Nursing (or equivalent two-year qualification) (2017: 53.04%, n=96; 2023: 62.11%, n=100), with the next most common qualification being a Certificate in Veterinary Nursing (or equivalent one-year qualification) (2017: 37.15%, n=68; 2023: 17.39%, n=28). Respondents were primarily qualified AVPs, with six students participating in the survey in 2019 and two in 2023. Respondents were predominantly from the Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland region in 2017 (46.20%, n=79), with most respondents coming from the Waikato region in 2023 (16.36%, n=27)

Table 1. Age group of respondents.

Age group	2017		2023	
	n	%	n	%
< 20	0	0%	2	0.93%
20–24	26	12.09%	30	13.95%
25–29	48	22.33%	44	20.47%
30–34	41	19.07%	26	12.09%
35–39	20	9.30%	14	6.51%
40–44	20	9.30%	20	9.30%
45–49	7	3.26%	11	5.12%
50–54	6	2.79%	8	3.72%
55–59	1	0.47%	6	2.79%
60+	1	0.47%	2	0.93%
Prefer not to say	45	20.93%	5	2.33%

Table 2. Time in role as AVP.

Time in role	2017		2023	
	n	%	n	%
< 6 months	26	13.54%	9	5.70%
6 months–1 year	30	15.63%	17	10.76%
1–2 years	36	18.75%	18	11.39%
2–4 years	34	17.71%	39	24.68%
4–6 years	21	10.94%	23	14.56%
6–10 years	20	10.42%	24	15.19%
10+ years	25	13.02%	28	17.72%

Table 3. Number of CPD events engaged in over previous 12 months by time in role.

Time in role	2017	Number of CPD events										
	n	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
< 6 months	24	11	5	1	0	2	1	1	0	0	0	3
6 months–1 year	29	15	1	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	1	6
1–2 years	33	10	3	8	0	2	2	2	0	3	0	3
2–4 years	34	6	4	2	2	2	3	1	1	1	2	10
4–6 years	21	3	4	4	1	1	2	0	3	0	0	3
6–10 years	19	2	4	2	1	2	1	0	1	3	0	3
10+ years	23	6	4	2	2	3	2	2	0	0	0	2

Time in role	2023	Number of CPD events										
	n	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
< 6 months	8	1	0	1	1	0	3	0	1	0	0	1
6 months–1 year	14	2	1	3	3	2	1	0	0	1	0	1
1–2 years	17	2	2	1	2	0	3	1	0	0	0	6
2–4 years	34	1	3	2	4	3	4	1	0	3	1	12
4–6 years	21	1	3	3	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	6
6–10 years	22	2	2	4	2	2	2	0	1	1	0	6
10+ years	27	1	1	2	2	1	4	3	0	2	0	11

– Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland respondents numbered 23 in 2023 (13.94%). The most selected age bracket for respondents for both surveys was the 25–29-year-old age range (2017: 22.33%, n=48; 2023: 20.47%, n=44) (Table 1).

Salary ranges for respondents increased from those reported in 2017, when 33.33% (n=43) earned between \$19 and \$21 per hour before tax (a gross annual salary of \$39,520–43,860), compared to most earning more than \$27 per hour before tax (a gross annual salary of more than \$56,160) in 2023 (48.72%, n=76). Almost half of the 2023 respondents (42.30%, n=66) earned between \$21 and \$25 per hour before tax (a gross annual salary of \$47,840–56,160). Most respondents had been AVPs for one to two years in 2017 (18.7%, n=36), and two to four years in 2023 (24.68%, n=39) (Table 2).

The relationship between the length of AVPs' time in roles and the number of CPD events engaged in over the previous 12 months was analysed. In 2017, of the 86 AVPs employed for up to two years, 41.86% (n=36) had engaged in no CPD events in the previous year. This number was lower in the 2023 survey, at 12.82% (n=5). In both 2017 and 2023, those who had been employed as an AVP for two to four years engaged in the most events, with 29.41% (n=10) stating they had participated in ten or more in 2017, and 35.29% (n=12) engaging in the same number in 2023. In 2017, AVPs who had been in their occupation for more than four years had engaged in the least events in the previous year, with 49.21% engaging in fewer than three (n=31). For the 2023 survey, those employed for 2–4 years also engaged in the most events (35.29%, n=12), and 40.74% (n=11) of AVPs employed for 10+ years stated they had also engaged in more than ten (Table 3).

Most respondents in the first survey were employed in predominantly small-animal practices (those that care for cats and dogs), with 59.51% (n=97) in this type of practice in 2017; however, in 2023, most respondents were working in a mixed practice, providing veterinary services for both small and large animals (cats, dogs, cattle, sheep and other farm or production animals) (42.66%, n=61).

CPD interest areas

The highest-demand interest areas for CPD in both surveys were emergency/critical care (2017: 20.47%, n=87; 2023: 14.05%, n=104) and anaesthesia (2017: 19.06%, n=81; 2023: 14.32%, n=106). In 2017, the third and fourth were diagnostic procedures (the collection and testing of biological samples such as blood and

urine, and imaging processes such as radiography) and surgery, 17.65% (n=75) selecting diagnostics in 2017, and 10.68% (n=79) in 2023. In 2017, 12.94% (n=55) chose surgery, and in 2023, 11.08% (n=82). Respondents were able to choose 'Other' as an option, and in a small number of cases, CPD activities noted here were re-allocated to a primary category – for example, when 'Radiography' was entered, it was grouped under diagnostic procedures.

Engagement with CPD

Respondents were asked to state how many CPD events they had attended in the 12 months prior to the date of the survey. In 2017, 186 respondents answered this question (53 qualified AVPs and three who stated they were veterinary nursing students). Most respondents stated they had engaged in no events (30.11%, n=56), whereas, in 2023, most respondents stated they had attended ten or more events (24.38%, n=39). Attendance at ten or more events in the year prior to the 2017 survey was the second highest response (16.13%, n=30). Conversely, attendance at none was the second highest response in the 12 months prior to the 2023 survey (21.88%, n=35) (Figure 1).

Respondents were also asked about their plans for the 12 months following the survey, and if they planned to participate in the same, more or fewer CPD events. In 2017, 42.47% (n=79) participants stated they intended to participate in the same number in the following year, with 55.91% (n=104) planning to participate in more, and 1.61% (n=3) intending to participate in fewer. In 2023, 44.62% (n=58) planned to participate in the same number, 36.92% (n=48) planned to engage in more, and 18.46% (n=24) planned to engage in fewer events. The most common way respondents participated in these events in 2017 was via single-day conferences (14.77%, n=35), while most participants engaged in online training for their CPD (45.07%, n=137) in 2023.

Respondents were asked what their motivations were to engage in CPD, and what benefits they felt they gained from participation. In both surveys, respondents' primary motivation was a personal interest in a topic (2017: 46.35%, n=146; 2023: 45.78%, n=114), closely followed by CPD being a requirement to maintain status as a registered veterinary nurse (2017: 37.46%, n=118; 2023: 40.56%, n=101). In both surveys, improving work skills (2017: 37.60%, n=94; 2023: 50.80%, n=127) and gaining confidence in skills (2017: 36.80%, n=92; 2023: 54.40%, n=136) were the two most common benefits selected (Table 4).

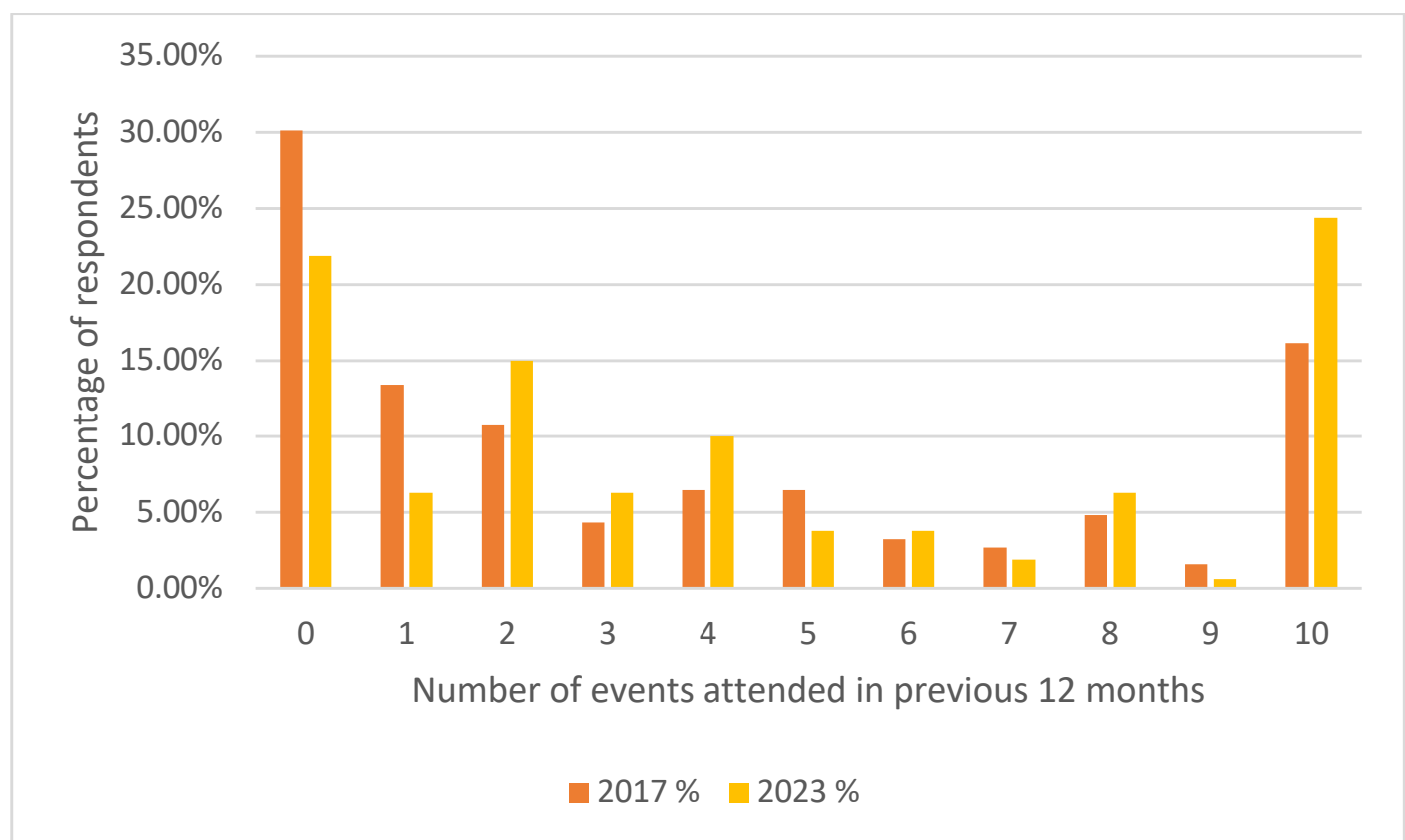


Figure 1. Number of events attended in the previous 12 months by respondents in the 2017 and 2023 surveys.

Table 4. Benefits to respondents from attending CPD events.

Benefits from participating in CPD	2017		2023	
	n	%	n	%
Improved work skills	94	37.60%	127	50.80%
More confidence in skills & knowledge	92	36.80%	136	54.40%
More responsibility at work/promotion	19	7.60%	33	13.20%
Pay increase	4	1.60%	12	4.80%
Become the 'go-to' person for a skill/topic	41	16.40%	74	29.60%
Other	0	0.00%	8	3.20%
No benefit	0	0.00%	0	0.00%

Barriers to CPD

Participants who had attended three or more CPD events were provided with a pre-populated list of general reasons for not participating in CPD events, with the most selected reason being the cost of CPD in both the 2017 and 2023 surveys, with scarcity of suitable CPD opportunities ranking second (Table 5).

Respondents who stated they had participated in fewer than three CPD events in the previous 12 months were also asked what barriers there were to a higher

level of participation. A lack of CPD options was the most common reason in 2017 (24.91%, n=71) and 2023 (30.00%, n=26) (Table 6).

Respondents were then asked who had paid for the CPD they had participated in over the last 12 months (Figure 2). In 2017, 58.88% (n=63) had their CPD paid for by their employer; however, in 2023 this had reduced to 20.98% (n=30), with most participants stating their employer had paid for no CPD in 2023 (41.26%, n=59).

Table 5. Barriers to participation in CPD for respondents who had attended three or more CPD events in the 12 months prior to survey.

Barriers to participating in CPD (> 3 events)	2017		2023	
	n	%	n	%
Lack of employer support (cost)	104	34%	89	34%
Availability	93	30%	83	32%
Lack of employer support (time)	63	20%	66	25%
Family commitments	24	8%	14	5%
Other	25	8%	7	3%

Table 6. Barriers to participation in CPD for respondents who had attended fewer than three CPD events in the 12 months prior to survey.

Barriers to participating in CPD (< 3 events)	2017		2023	
	n	%	n	%
Lack of CPD options available	71	24.91%	39	30.00%
No CPD events offered that match my interests	27	9.47%	12	9.23%
Lack of employer support (cost)	38	13.33%	17	13.08%
Lack of employer support (time)	26	9.12%	16	12.31%
No interest in completing any CPD events	2	0.70%	1	0.77%
CPD events not convenient (too far away, etc.)	46	16.14%	18	13.85%
Family commitments	27	9.47%	11	8.46%
CPD events are often too long	9	3.16%	3	2.31%
Got no value from prior CPD events	5	1.75%	3	2.31%

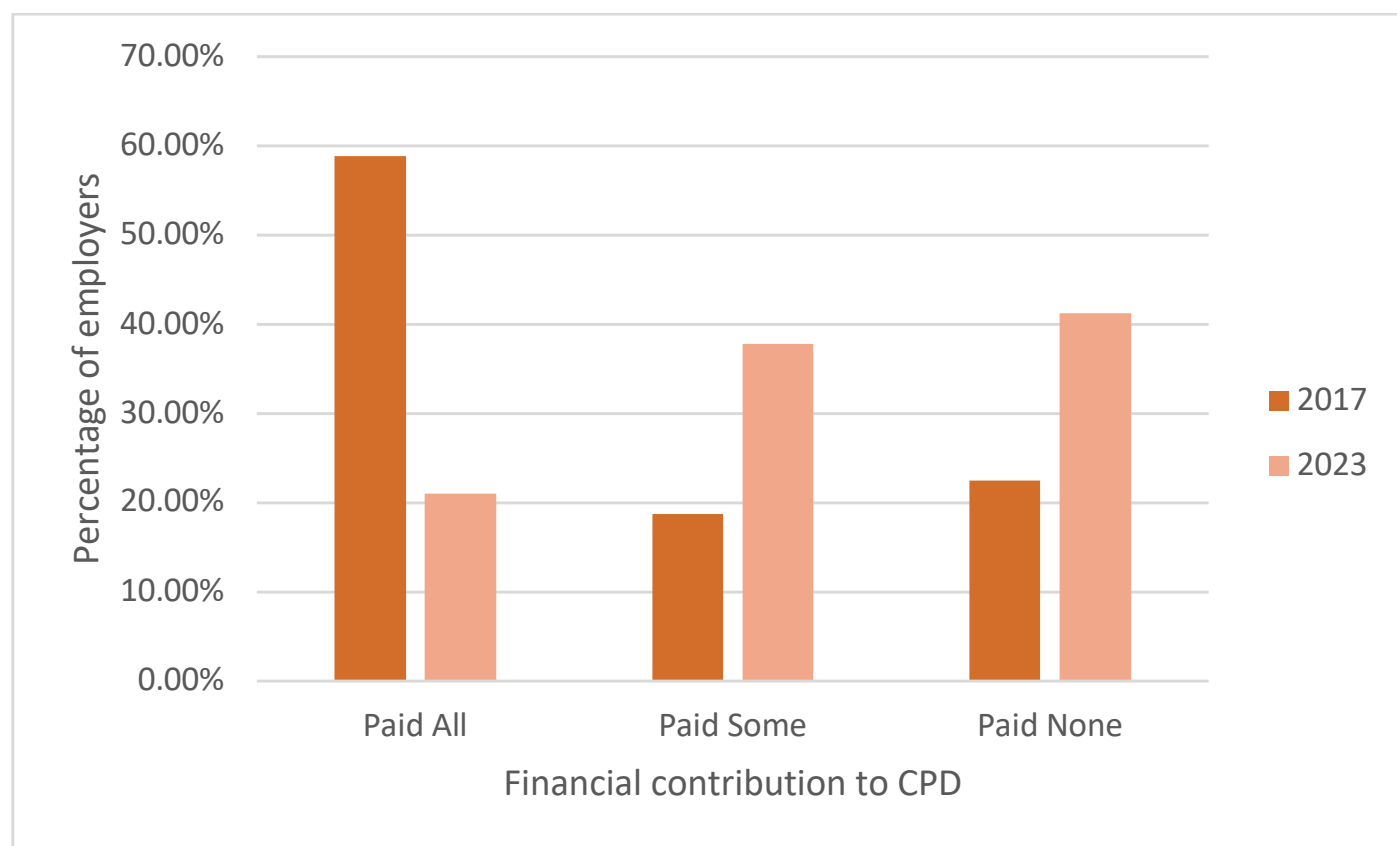


Figure 2. Financial contribution by employer for CPD events in the 12 months prior to each survey.

Discussion

The introduction of voluntary registration for AVPs in Aotearoa / New Zealand in 2014 brought with it a greater focus on CPD. These professionals perform a wide range of skilled activities in a clinical setting (Vivian et al. 2023; Young 2021), with most having only two-year formal qualifications, as this study identifies. This relatively short time in higher education restricts the breadth and depth of their learning, and in subsequent employment learning needs expand based on a graduate's workplace experiences (Goglio & Bertolini 2021). The role of the AVP has evolved substantially in the last 20 years (Kinnison et al. 2014), and continued training is necessary to meet the complex and ever-changing requirements of their roles. This process is often referred to as 'lifelong learning', a process that can enhance clinical performance and job satisfaction, and result in better patient outcomes (Branscombe & Lumbis 2010). The Aotearoa / New Zealand veterinary sector, in line with global trends, has faced staff shortages for a number of years (Harniman 2024; Young 2021), a situation that may relate to poor satisfaction levels by AVPs. The opportunity to learn new

skills and feel valued by employers has been shown to increase job satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of AVPs leaving the sector (Jeffery & Taylor 2022).

Demographics

There was a broader geographical spread in the 2023 survey, the Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland area predominating in the 2017 survey. Respondents tended to be from rural areas in 2023, so were more likely to be employed in a mixed practice, as opposed to an urban companion-animal practice. The move to more rural areas may be a reflection of the increased cost of living in Aotearoa / New Zealand (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa 2024). The mean rent and household value in the Waikato region in 2023 were 20.72% and 36.25% lower respectively than in the Tāmaki Makaurau / Auckland region, yet the mean salary was only 16.61% lower (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment 2025). Salary rates also increased in the surveyed period, most likely in line with inflation and the possible increased willingness of employers to meet the Aotearoa / New Zealand Living Wage guidelines (Living Wage Aotearoa New Zealand 2023).

It was reassuring to note that participation by experienced AVPs in CDP was trending higher in 2023. In 2017, it was more likely that AVPs with two to four years' experience would engage in the most events. However, in 2023, they were almost equalled by AVPs who had been in their occupation for ten years or more. This increased level of participation may be attributable to increased awareness of registration and the associated CPD requirements, but the animal healthcare sector has also often followed human healthcare trends in relation to CPD. The benefits of CPD in human healthcare have been widely documented in terms of job satisfaction and personal wellbeing, clinical competency, job security and improved patient outcomes (Harvey & Cameron 2020; Katsikitis et al. 2013; Manley et al. 2018; Panthi & Pant 2018; Ryan 2003), and these benefits are also likely to occur in the animal healthcare sector. Further training and professional development of veterinary staff has been shown to improve clinic productivity and improve staff motivation and performance (Coates 2012).

CPD interest areas

As adult learners, AVPs have made an active choice to engage in CPD; a sense of agency, perceived benefits, and support being key in successful learning (Broek et al. 2023). A common theme among respondents in their motivation for engaging in CPD was that it should intersect with their areas of interest – this is similar to the motivations of veterinarians (Gates et al. 2021). While there may often be a crossover between an AVP's role and interests (for example, a nurse working in a predominantly equine practice is likely to have an interest in attending equine-related events), and while engaging in CPD within areas of interest is effective, stepping out of comfort zones is important (Branscombe & Lumbis 2010). For CPD to be most effective, alignment with the needs of the workplace is vital (Forsetlund et al. 2009). CPD plans for healthcare practitioners such as AVPs should be formulated to meet the needs of the worker, employer and clients (Manley et al. 2018). Consulting with colleagues and conducting research into best practice is also valuable in the identification of CPD topics and opportunities (Branscombe & Lumbis 2010).

Two more complex interest areas identified in the surveys (emergency/critical care and anaesthesia) are topics that AVPs may have had limited exposure to as students, thereby creating a knowledge gap. In particular, many AVPs may have little experience of emergency and critical care even after being in practice for several years. This may result in being ill-equipped

to deal with emergencies when they arise in a clinical setting, leading to higher levels of workplace stress and negative general impacts on wellbeing (Harniman 2024; Lloyd & Campion 2017).

Engagement with CPD

The development of skills and confidence in the workplace as motivators for CPD engagement may reflect the current limitations of higher education for AVPs. The limits of the standard two-year qualification in Aotearoa / New Zealand mean that graduates cannot be prepared for every potential situation following completion of their formal education. Emergency, intensive and palliative care are difficult to explore fully in tertiary education, but preparation for these types of work is important to mitigate stress and improve patient outcomes (Panthi & Pant 2018).

A clear difference in the number of CPD events respondents engaged with in the 12 months prior to each survey was noted, with most respondents in the 2017 survey (30.11%, n=56) attending no events, compared with ten or more events attended by 24.38% (n=39) in the 2023 survey. Despite this shift, the second most common level of engagement in 2023 was attendance at no CPD events (21.88%, n=35). Results could suggest that the current level of engagement may be at saturation point for some AVPs, due to more 2023 respondents stating that they had no intention to increase their engagement in the following 12 months. But for almost the same number of AVPs who responded, strong barriers existed that prevented them from engaging in CPD at all, which is a more likely explanation for non-participation.

The strong shift towards online training shown in the 2023 survey (which is likely to be related to Covid-19 restrictions) (Aristovnik et al. 2023; Dhawan 2020) suggests more AVPs are engaging in shorter CPD courses online. This is evident in the total number of events AVPs participated in according to the 2023 survey – 24.38% participated in ten or more events, compared to 16.13% in 2017 (Figure 1). This varies from the mode of CPD historically preferred by veterinarians, who have tended to opt for face-to-face learning and the collegial interaction that comes with this (Gates et al. 2021). The psychosocial benefits of face-to-face learning can be challenging to replicate in an online learning environment, where communication is limited between participants (Li et al. 2023). This may be improved if an existing community of practice is in place, if participants are more familiar with this mode of learning, and the

facilitators are skilled (Dhawan 2020). Furthermore, learners tend to prefer delivery modes and approaches that are familiar and comfortable (Arghode et al. 2017; Truong 2016).

The relative efficacy of online and face-to-face learning is still being debated: face-to-face learning brings with it considerable costs and logistical issues, while online learning requires a stable internet connection and digital competence (Dhawan 2020; Li et al. 2023). Successful online education also relies on the competency of educators, who must engage learners and enhance learning with digital tools to make connections between educator and learner (Demeshkant et al. 2022; Dhawan 2020). Whatever mode is used, it should be remembered that the combination of interactivity and didactic learning together (seminars, symposia, lectures) is more effective than didactic or interactive learning alone (Forsetlund et al. 2009).

Barriers to CPD

While the barriers to CPD reported by veterinarians included difficulties fitting it in around work and family commitments (Gates et al. 2021), the most common barriers for AVPs who engaged in more than three events in the previous year were insufficient financial support from their employer and the availability of suitable CPD opportunities. Many CPD events offered in Aotearoa / New Zealand currently are in a seminar or conference format, which are costly both in time and money. A move towards CPD events that are shorter and accessible via webinar or other online format, and thereby lower in cost, may address this barrier. Didactic CPD may be the more traditional format of delivery, however, it has been shown to result in the lowest positive impact on patients and clinical practice (Forsetlund et al. 2009; Wallace & May 2016). Online learning has the potential to provide more flexibility than didactic CPD learning, but it has its own limitations, as noted previously.

The surveys revealed a wider variety of barriers for respondents who engaged in fewer than three events in the previous 12 months, with more respondents stating their lack of engagement was due to the limited options and topics available, followed by a lesser number indicating employer support was a barrier. This is further reflected in the strong shift away from payment of all CPD costs by employers in the 2023 survey. This change in employer support could be related to the 6.7% rise in inflation in Aotearoa / New Zealand in the 12 months to March 2023, which followed an increase of 7.2% in the year to December 2022 (Stats NZ Tatauranga Aotearoa

2023). This economic downturn, combined with the average hourly rate of 42.30% of respondents still being below the living wage of \$26.00 per hour (The Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit 2023), further limits access to more costly CPD events such as face-to-face conferences or seminars. As an example, the 2025 annual New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA) conference delegate fees ranged from \$800 to \$1,150 (excluding travel and accommodation costs), which may well be prohibitive for both clinics and individuals in the current economy.

Limitations

In 2018, 2,145 people described their occupation as 'veterinary nurse' in the New Zealand census (Careers.govt.nz, 2024). Despite promotion of the survey, the sample size of both surveys in this study was relatively small, and below the recommended size based on a power analysis of the population of veterinary nurses. Due to this, results may not be adequately representative of the total population. Furthermore, the structure of the survey meant that respondents were asked to report the number of CPD events they had attended, rather than the number of engagement hours. With a requirement of 40 CDP hours over two calendar years to maintain AVP registration, it is difficult to determine how many respondents are meeting current specifications. This study focused on understanding the needs of the AVP in relation to CPD, so the needs of the employer were not surveyed. For CPD to be most effective, these needs should be considered in tandem, along with any patient-specific needs (for example species-specific needs, or needs of our critical-care patients).

Conclusion

With changes to CPD requirements in the last 12 months to an RCPD model, there is a need to understand the approach by AVPs in relation to these changes. Methods to mitigate financial and time-related barriers should also be investigated to increase access to CPD and optimise benefits to the veterinary sector, including increased staff satisfaction, patient outcomes and employee sustainability. The latter may provide additional benefits such as offering a partial solution to staff shortages in the Aotearoa / New Zealand veterinary sector. The changing landscape of the profession and the types of CPD engaged with by AVPs both present opportunities for additional research. Given that the shift to RCPD

still includes a set number of professional development hours, this new reflective CPD model presents an opportunity to investigate its impacts on animal care in a clinical context and the employer–employee dyad.

Ethics Approval

Ethics approval was gained from the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (approval 2017-1059) for the 2017 study, and from the Otago Polytechnic Research Ethics Committee (approval 982) for the 2023 study.

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