

Reflective CPD practice

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Introduction

From 2024, all allied veterinary professionals (AVPs) registered with the Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council (AVPRC) will be required to undertake reflective continuing professional development (RCPD) as part of their annual practising certificate (APC).

Allied Veterinary Professionals should complete professional development (PD) relevant to their practice, followed by reflective writing that captures insights and learning from the experience. While this reflective approach to continuing professional development (CPD) is well-established in fields such as pharmacy and healthcare, it is a new practice for allied veterinary professionals (Morton 2023).

The RCPD requirement for AVPs works alongside the registration standards set by the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (VCNZ) for veterinarians. The AVPRC envisions AVPs engaging in RCPD alongside veterinarians as they fulfil their own professional development obligations.

The AVPRC standard for registration includes completion of RCPD on an ongoing basis to help demonstrate fitness to practice as the field of animal healthcare is constantly evolving with new research findings, techniques, technologies, and best practices (AVPRC 2025).

What is reflective practice?

Reflective practice is the process of critically examining one's own experiences and actions in order to learn from them and create an action plan to improve future performance. It involves analysing and evaluating situations, actions, and decisions, and considering the impact and outcomes they have had. This practice can lead to the development of new skills and insight, although it does take skill and learning to be able to undertake a true and meaningful reflection (Morton 2023).

“Reflective practice is the ability to reflect on one's actions so as to engage in a process of continuous learning” (Schön 1987).

The reflective practice process typically involves the following steps:

1. Describing the situation or experience that you are reflecting on.
2. Analysing your thoughts, feelings, and actions during the situation.
3. Evaluating the impact and outcomes of your actions.
4. Identifying areas for improvement and considering alternative courses of action.
5. Developing a plan for implementing changes in your future practice. (Morton 2023).

As AVPs, we can use reflectiveness to further develop our nursing practices to promote better patient outcomes and increase our skill levels

Donald Schön (1987) talks about effective practitioners being able to reflect on their actions in their day to day lives. He called this reflection-in-action, the ability to think on your feet and to use observation and listening to problem solve (Schön, 1987). For AVP's, this is an effective skill to have and one that is needed in a fast paced and busy veterinary hospital. However, alongside this one should also be able to stop at the end of a busy day and reflect on what happened. This 'reflection-on-action' (Schön, 1987) is an essential part of ensuring that the experiences of the day are explored, actions are thought about and to examine alternative ways of doing things.

Reflective writing

As part of reflective CPD for AVPRC registration, reflective writing should happen as part of a CPD plan. Reflective writing can be different for every person and is a personal account of the experience or learning that was undertaken. Using reflective journaling can create a deeper critical thinker to improve practice, it can help with the development of problem-solving, building critical thinking skills, and evaluation of situations (Kok and Chabeli 2002).

There are many different forms that reflective writing can take from journals, diaries, logbooks to peer review and self-assessment. However, it is important in terms of the RCPD required for AVPRC registration, that RCPD writing follows certain steps to ensure goals and learning actions are shown especially for auditing purposes.

- Step 1: Plan your RCPD
- Step 2: Do the RCPD
- Step 3: Reflect on the RCPD
- Step 4: Store the RCPD

Following these steps ensures that AVP's are well prepared for completing their RCPD requirements (AVPRC, 2025). For more information about RCPD requirements for registration see the AVPRC website.

Reflective models

Using a reflective model with steps and prompt questions will significantly help those who are perhaps unfamiliar with or lack confidence in the concept of reflective practice. A model of reflection or a framework of reflection is a structured process or steps that guide you through the description, analysis, evaluation, and improvement of an experience (Brush 2020; Morton 2023). A wide variety of models can be used, and an individual must decide which model or combination of frameworks suits them best. It is also essential to add that not everyone needs to use a model as long as the reflective thinking process is used (Brush 2020; Morton 2023).

For beginning reflective practitioners, a simpler model such as the *What? So What? Now what?* (Driscoll 1994), a three-step approach to reflecting can make it easier to understand and undertake the reflection process. For more experienced practitioners, a model such as the Gibbs reflective cycle (1988) with its seven steps could promote a more in-depth reflection. This model introduces the learner to think about analysing and evaluating their own feelings and to start developing awareness and perception of those who were involved in the reflective situation (Gibbs 1988). Both models can have prompt questions added at each step to help practitioners. These questions can be tailored to suit the learning or situation.

It is important to emphasise that the reflective process is a learning cycle where one thought or experience can lead to new learning ideas (and the cycle starts again). It can change an individual's ideas and involves looking at issues in various ways (Brush 2020). But done properly reflective practice can increase self-awareness and confidence in abilities leading to better patient outcomes and safety.

Challenges to reflective practices

One of the challenges facing AVPs in undertaking reflective practice is the ability to undertake reflectivity at work. A workplace must accept and embrace reflective practices to make AVPs comfortable with the process. A lack of support from the workplace is a common reason AVP's are unsure or unwilling to be reflective, as it is viewed as an unnecessary part of the day. To overcome this, workplaces should encourage reflective practices and allow AVPs to undertake RCPD as part of daily work activities (Morton 2023).

Benefits of reflective practice

Being a reflective practitioner benefits growth and development when learning new practical skills or coping with new situations and experiences. It can have a positive outcome in personal and work relationships. Reflectiveness teaches AVP's how to describe a situation, to look at how it affected all those involved and then make an action plan for moving forwards should a situation or similar happen again.

This technique can be applied to any part of one's life; being reflective is a tool that can help with stress and anxiety, which in the veterinary industry, if left unchecked, can lead to compassion fatigue and burnout (Fontaine 2018; Foote 2020; Morton 2023).

Conclusion

The veterinary industry involves a high level of practical skills; it is here that reflective practices can help improve the growth and development of these skills. This would help grow and produce well-skilled veterinary nurses, technicians and allied health professionals and ensure that they can undertake the new RCPD requirements for registration. Plus, understanding the concept of reflective practice can help with ever-increasing stress and anxiety within the industry (Morton 2023).

By making reflective practice more understandable, accessible, and positive, we can aim to grow AVP's confidence to become reflective practitioners.

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