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A STUDY OF THE INFORMATION SEARCH PROCESS USED BY VETERINARIANS IN CLINICAL PRACTICE IN NEW ZEALAND

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Christopher James Boland
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ABSTRACT

Veterinarians face problems in deciding whether or not to adopt new technical innovations which become available to them for use in veterinary practice and in solving problems they have not previously faced. In these "new situations" which they face frequently, they must draw on various sources of information to make an informed evaluation.

This thesis examines the process by which practising veterinarians search for this information, the sources they use, and the problems they face. By the nature of the information being sought, it was necessary to gather the data after the search for information on a particular topic had been completed. To minimise the biases inherent in reconstruction of past events, three different research approaches were used to provide complementary insights into the information search procedure.

Information concerning the nature of the employment and work of veterinarians is presented, with particular emphasis on the 70% of the profession who are employed in practice.

The value and limitations of various information sources were investigated, and views sought on needs not currently met. The most important feature of the information sources from the viewpoint of respondents was that they be in a form that is easily stored, retrieved and used, so that information was at hand when it was needed. Information supplied at a time remote from the need was not valued highly, compared with (possibly lower quality) information available easily when it was needed. Requests for additional information services concentrated heavily on those which would improve the management of information within the work environment.

Veterinarians see themselves as active users of information, but working under severe time constraints which limit their options. There were no marked differences among various categories of veterinarians in their search approaches.

Since requests to them were infrequent, the managers of information sources saw veterinarians as passive in their search behaviour. In fact, this was because time pressures forced veterinarians to use locally available information for most searches, resorting to recognized information suppliers only when local sources failed them.

There was clearly a mismatching between these two viewpoints, and in the light of the study a map of

information source usage has been drawn up, showing the intensity of use of various sources. There is an "inner circle" of information sources that are used for most problems. Preferred sources are those with which the veterinarians can interact easily, especially those with which they are familiar. They prefer those which reduce the time required to complete the search process.

The patterns of information use identified in the study are likely to be applicable to other professional groups which have frequent need for new information. Educators will also find this study of information search useful for their professional training curriculum development.

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