

# safety bulletin

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Examining Practice Leadership

Education & Training

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## Protecting Students and Volunteers

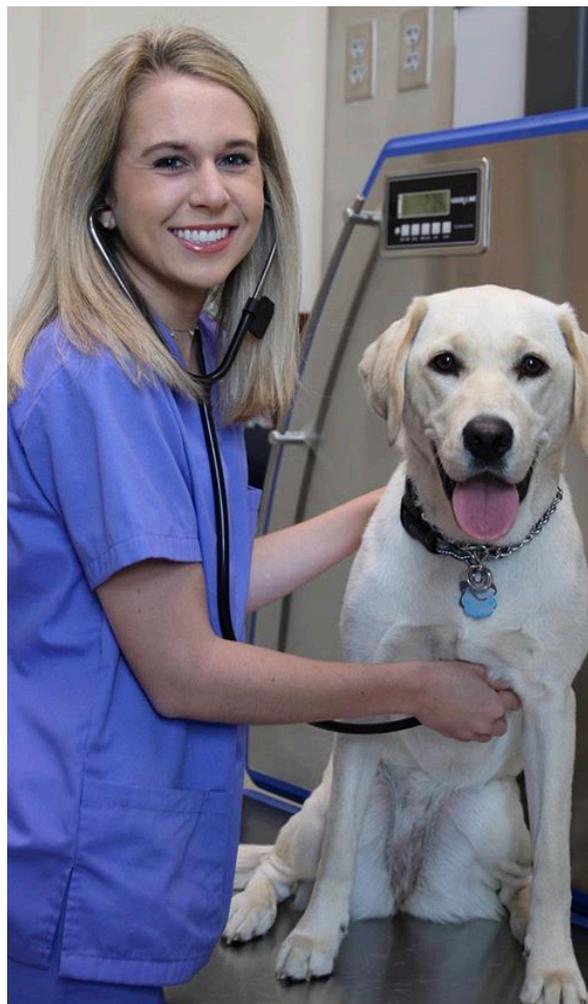
Practice owners have a responsibility to provide a safe workplace for not only their employees, but also for any students or volunteers that their clinic might host. Offering students an opportunity to experience the veterinary profession as a volunteer or extern is beneficial to both the individual and the veterinary profession as a whole. It's important to remember that implementing safety programs is a crucial part of maintaining safety during these clinical or volunteer experiences. The backbone of a student/volunteer safety program is combination of well-established practice leadership, thorough education and training, and open communication.

### The Importance of Practice Leadership

Practice management and the clinic's team of supervising veterinarians provide the oversight and resources needed to implement an effective safety program. Volunteers and students look to the practice's staff and management for direction and information on daily procedures, safe work practices, and day to day responsibilities. Together, practice staff should:

- Provide appropriate supervision and guidance of volunteers and student externs
- Make employee and volunteer/student extern safety and health a core organizational value
- Be fully committed to eliminating and avoiding hazards, protecting employees and volunteers, and continuously improving workplace safety and health

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- Provide sufficient resources to implement and maintain the safety and health program
- Visibly demonstrate and communicate their safety and health commitment to everyone within the practice
- Set an example with individual actions by following all safety procedures
- Begin staff meetings with a discussion or review of safety and health indicators and any outstanding safety items on a “to do” list.

Before volunteers or students arrive at the practice, define safety program goals and objectives. By doing so, expectations are set not just for safety but for the volunteer or clinical experience overall.

## Education & Training

Education and training are critical tools for informing students and volunteers about workplace hazards and thus enabling them to be safe while they work, learn, or observe. Taking the time to thoroughly educate clinic newcomers allows them to familiarize themselves with their new environment. It also provides students and volunteers with:

- The basic knowledge needed to do their work safely and to avoid creating hazards that could place themselves or others at risk
- Awareness and understanding of workplace hazards and how to identify and report them
- Specialized training should their work involve unfamiliar hazards

Additional training may be needed depending on the comfort level of the student or volunteer. Effective training, especially within a practice environment, should be provided before they are asked to perform any assigned duties. Peer-to-peer training demonstrations

## Student Malpractice Coverage

Mistakes happen, but they shouldn't be the end to a future veterinarian's career. AVMA PLIT offers a student version of our professional liability coverage. To learn more about the **benefits of student malpractice coverage** through the PLIT program, visit [avmaplit.com/students](http://avmaplit.com/students).

can be effective in conveying safety concepts, ensuring understanding of hazards and their controls and promoting good work practices. Instruct student externs and volunteers on your clinic's procedures for reporting injuries, incidents, and any concerns. The opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback during and after training should be provided to all students and volunteers.

## Communication

A clear, written policy helps you communicate that safety and health is a primary value within your clinic. Communicate safety policies to all workers, Student externs, and volunteers at appropriate times and places. Management leads the program effort by establishing roles and responsibilities and providing an open, positive environment that encourages communication about safety and health. Many safety issues begin with student externs or volunteers being unfamiliar with certain animals. Ensure that externs and volunteers understand that they have the ability to speak up and to let the veterinarians or their direct supervisors know when they are unsure or uncomfortable with certain duties or situations.

*For more information on AVMA PLIT's recommendations regarding student and volunteer work, see [avmaplit.com/students](http://avmaplit.com/students).*

## Spotlight: Federal Fair Labor Standards Act



Since it's common for some volunteers and students to be minors, it is important to understand the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) which addresses child labor standards affecting full-time and part-time workers. Each veterinary establishment that uses volunteers/students should be aware of the labor laws within the state where the establishment is located. Assessing liability coverage regarding professional liability, worker's compensation, and public liability relative to the action of a volunteer should be discussed with your insurance carrier. Getting parental consent is important.

View the full suite of AVMA Trust program offerings at [avmaplit.com](http://avmaplit.com) and [avmalife.org](http://avmalife.org).

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