Guidelines for Pregnant Veterinary Students

The potential for injury during the education of veterinary students increases during pregnancy. Exposure to toxic drugs, infectious agents, inhalation anesthetics, radiation, and other agents present real hazards to unborn fetuses, particularly during the first trimester of pregnancy. In addition to chemical, infectious, and radiation dangers, physical accidents incurred while working with animals may also lead to serious injuries for mother and fetus.

The potential hazards vary over the course of the curriculum and the actual situations or animals/patients the student encounters, and these are not identical for all students at all times. The following list provides an overview of the types of hazards a student might wish to consider and about which she may wish to consult with her health care provider:

- Laboratories
    - Formalin, phenol exposure in anatomy or pathology labs
    - Anesthetic gas exposure in surgery labs, anesthesia labs, etc.
    - Zoonotic diseases or other infectious agents that may be encountered in pathology, bacteriology, animal handling labs, etc. (for example, Toxoplasma, Cryptosporidia, Brucella, Salmonella, Coxiella, etc.)

- Clinical Rotations
    - In general – long work hours, exposure to sometimes unruly small and large animals, toxic drugs and anesthetic gases, infectious diseases, physical labor of lifting heavy animals, etc.
    - Radiology and Oncology rotations – exposure to various types of radiation from therapeutic or diagnostic compounds or devices
    - Ag Animal and Equine rotations – exposure to prostaglandins, parasiticides (i.e., organophosphates, etc.), Brucella abortus vaccine, infectious organisms (Cryptosporidia, Brucella, Salmonella, Chlamydia, etc.), heat, sometimes dusty conditions, and often much standing and walking.
    - Other risks inherent to work with animals generally and unique to particular rotations or circumstances, some of which are not predictable and may vary over time.

Rights and Responsibilities

In addition to maintaining her established student rights, the pregnant woman has rights and the responsibility for decisions concerning her pregnancy regarding safety and childbearing.

- Pregnant students are expected to complete each and every requirement of the veterinary curriculum. If the risks of completing certain components or specific assignments in the DVM curriculum are deemed unacceptable, pregnant students will develop – in consultation with faculty and the Associate Dean (or Director) of Student and Academic Affairs – an alternate equivalent plan or schedule of study deemed acceptable by the University, the student, and her attending physician that can be implemented and by

which any inherent risks are deemed reasonable and assumable by the student and her physician or qualified health care provider. Once it is approved by the Associate Dean (or Director) of Student and Academic Affairs, the student will follow this alternate plan, and copies of all documents pertaining to revised assignments will be kept on file in the Office of Student Services. Medical information in that file, if any, shall be kept separately and shall not be made available, except to personnel of Student Services with a need to know.

- For activities requiring a physician's release for any student, pregnant students will also be required to provide such a release.

Best Interests

It is in the best interests of pregnant students to maintain regular contact with their physicians/health care providers and to take appropriate steps to minimize exposure to hazards inherent to veterinary medical education and the veterinary profession. However, the University cannot fundamentally alter its established curriculum or academic program. Although pregnancy is not generally considered a disability, pregnant students may wish to inform the Associate Dean for Student and Academic Affairs as early as possible to facilitate communication and to take advantage of available options. Notification of the CVM of pregnancy is not mandatory, but effective steps to address risks cannot be taken unless the student provides this notice.

Available Options

A pregnant student may pursue the following options in consultation with her physician and the College as outlined in this guideline:

- The student may opt to continue regular student enrollment with selected schedule and assignment changes. This option is not without risks and may or may not delay completion of the DVM program. It depends upon:
    - the student's ability to participate in a revised educational program acceptable to the College and not fundamentally altering the DVM educational program; and
    - the ability of the College to make changes in the student's schedule of courses and/or clinical assignments in advance.

- A student in good academic standing may submit to the Associate Dean for Student and Academic Affairs a written request to take a leave of absence from the DVM program for a period of time not to exceed one academic year. Requests for longer leaves require a review by the Student Progress Committee and approval of the Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine. This option minimizes health hazards and risks associated with attempting to continue a veterinary medical education while maintaining a pregnancy.

A student whose pregnancy poses a known significant risk to personal safety or the safety of others may be provided several options by the College of Veterinary Medicine in consultation with the student, health care provider(s), and other experts as relevant, including adjustment of course or clinical rotation schedules, adjustment of the requirements of particular course or rotation so long as the fundamental requirements of the rotation are not altered, or medical leave.