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Learning the Animals, the Medicine, and the Field

As a student at Baxter Academy for Science and Technology, I get every Friday as independent project time. This year I chose to find an internship at a local veterinary clinic. In reflecting on my experiences I also researched other's experiences as aspiring veterinarians.

When I was little I had a book called Vicky the Vet about a vet's day treating patients. Like most young children I at that moment decided I wanted to be a vet. Since then I've had plenty of other career aspirations, and I don't credit a picture book that I eventually landed back on a veterinary track. Any teenager who has ever considered a career in an animal care field has struggled to find work experience. After emailing every clinic within a thirty-five-mile radius essentially begging them to take an intern younger and less experienced than they would want, I was feeling sufficiently daunted. Turns out I'm not alone; Chis Carpenter, DVM points out, "almost 1 in 5 tweens (ages 9 - 14) wants to become a veterinarian," in an article about his web community Vet Set Go dedicated to aspiring veterinarians. Dr. Carpenter's goal is to guide teens to observation and work experience opportunities and encourage vets to take on interns. I didn't get any response to my emails for about two weeks other than one practice who filled their work shadow program while I was coordinating a meeting with them. Eventually, I was lucky enough to get an email from Dr. Parthum the owner of Brunswick Veterinary Clinic offering me hands-on volunteer time. The experiences I've had at the clinic that stand out sometimes play in my head like a modern-day James Herriot novel. Though Dr. Wight(used the pen name, James Herriot) has been criticized for romanticizing practicing life there is still something very compelling about his timeless stories. The AVMA(American Veterinary Medicine Association) also talked about how Dr. Wight's work has, "influenced or reinforced," many students, "decision to become a veterinarian" as well as their power as teaching tools. James Herriot is now acknowledged as the past, and every generation of veterinary workers take the time to teach the next aspiring veterinarians.

In my time at Brunswick Veterinary Clinic I received amazing mentorship but I also observed the mentorship the staff gave to each other. Young techs would ask more experienced ones to run over anesthesia monitoring and all members of the staff were encouraging each other to practice procedures. One of the certified techs offered to start study groups to help younger staff members get their certification. On the VETgirl blog CTV, Amy Newfield compares her experiences through star wars quotes showing her gratitude, "for all the Yodas in my life who have passed on their knowledge to me." Although I wouldn't relate it to Star Wars I echo Newfield's sentiments. I remember

being very surprised when Dr. Parthum asked me if I knew how to do a blood draw and continued to talk me through it. The feeling drawing even a tiny bit of blood on the first stick can't be articulated with words. Gaining hands-on experience is how new veterinary professionals are made because as Dr. Kristina Magnifico says in her blog, "we haven't had years of residency to help white-glove us into the world that awaits us." I watched everyone in the practice reconstituting and drawing up vaccines, restraining animals, running lab work, and pulling up IV flushes so I could eventually replicate it. The importance of mentorship is seconded by Kyle Palmer, CTV that it is, "long recognized that mentorship is extremely valuable to new veterinarians," and how it's a developing concept on dmv360.com. As amazing as the feeling of accomplishment is when you do something for the first time I'm always a little unsure if what I'm doing is right. When I first drew back a rabies vaccine after carefully inserting it under the cat's skin I looked up at the tech who had offered me the vaccine to give to confirm I should continue with the injection. Palmer's article explains mentorships used to be more of an orientation than any continued teaching. I feel very lucky to be in a generation of working vets who believe, "it is everyone's job to pass on what they have learned," like Amy Newfield. All the technicians and DVMs worked with have taken the time to teach me valuable clinical skills I will use in the future.

The majority of the articles I read while researching for this paper identified people who go into veterinary medicine because of a love of animals, especially a connection with a family pet. Dr. Chis Carpenter who's work is discussed earlier in the paper said most practicing vets chose their career before they were 13 in the same interview. He continues on in the article to express this data displays, "veterinary medicine is a calling, one that starts early in life." Other than a mutual love for animals I've encountered both as a shelter and clinic volunteer "The Life of a Veterinarian" highlights the importance of communication with owners. In this article, Ting Pen writes, "this is where having great interpersonal skills come in. Animals come attached with human caretakers." Handling owners and all the challenges they bring are the subjects of many veterinary blogs and articles. I've watched a tech have a thirty-minute phone conversation which she spent patiently nodding along to a client's endless monologues and still managing to have a smile and a little laugh left for the other techs and me. Patience is identified as one of the qualities of a good veterinary technician on veterinarypracticenews.com. Patients can be trying but we're more inclined to give them "the benefit of the doubt" but "both clients and the rest of the veterinary team where we work" deserve patience as well. Having a great amount of compassion and patience generally means veterinary professionals get along well. One of my close family friends who is currently at Glasgow vet school has said how quickly and easily she became close with some of her classmates and current roommates because of their similar personalities. I also felt I easily fit in both as a volunteer at our local shelter and into my

internship at Brunswick Veterinary Clinic. One of the techs I worked with said people who work with animals are the same kind of weird that means we would rather be with animals and practicing medicine, which is what makes animal people click. Dr. Christina Magnifico echoed, “At some point in your veterinary career you accept your quirks and embrace them as the fabric that made you whole,” on her blog. The reality of anyone who chooses to work with animals is that we are all that person at the party petting the dog in the corner. Whether it’s a love of animals, patience, and all the other traits, or a combination of both make veterinary professionals easy to work with if you share an interest in animals and the medicine.

Despite having families and medically challenged pets every veterinarian and veterinary technician I’ve had the pleasure of learning from have had time to spare for me and all their patients. “If having a soul means being able to feel love and loyalty and gratitude, then animals are better off than a lot of humans.” - James Herriot

Maybe being a little more animal than human is what makes someone right for the veterinary field.

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