

# What Can't Be Taught

## Ce qui ne s'enseigne pas

### Becoming a vet; What may be in your first year

Dr. Brianne Cantafio

**B**eing asked to write an article about my first year in practice was both exciting and daunting. There are many wonderful things about being a doctor that I want to share with brand new graduates but, like many things in life, there are also moments that I wish to put behind me. I am not ashamed of these moments, they helped me learn and challenged me to grow, but sometimes learning and growing require making mistakes and we all know how well our A-type personalities love to make mistakes...

I remember being accepted into vet school. I remember the first day as if it were yesterday. I remember the exam schedules, sleepless nights, and attempting to balance life and school. I remember graduation and the pride I felt to finally become a veterinarian. I remember thinking that the portion of my life as a student at university was over and I was now a veterinarian; all of my hard work culminating in this final milestone. Yet when I emerged as a trained veterinarian, I realized my final milestone was only a fleeting moment within a much larger transition period between student and professional.

Our profession consists of constant learning and higher knowledge; you will not be asked to write a test every day but there has not been one day I have not picked up a textbook to review something before or after a case. And this is where a deficit of our education may reside. We are not taught about the importance of a support system within our profession post-graduation; not only should no one have to go at this alone, more importantly, you *cannot* do this alone. Although we are trained and educated professionals who should have pride and confidence in our skills and knowledge, there is so much that we just don't get to do before embarking on our own! Many examples come to mind, but ask questions and dive right in because most of the time we know the principles but could still benefit from asking for help.

I believe I also had a false sense of security after graduation that those "sleepless nights" would be fewer and farther

between once I became a veterinarian. No one tells you that you never really fall into a deep REM sleep when you're on call, your phone a foot away from your head on your pillow with the ringer turned on high volume in fear you may actually fall asleep and miss a call.

They don't teach us about catering to a variety of clients or working alongside colleagues of the "Baby Boomer" and "Generation X" eras. Being open-minded and recognizing the qualities of these generations that make them extraordinary veterinarians is very important. It will help you learn in unimaginable ways. Reflect on the reciprocation of this relationship; we all come from different walks of life and that is important to remember.

Most significantly, master your fear — this will be one of the biggest challenges you face as you transition from student to working veterinarian yet it is not taught to us within the safety of a classroom setting. When you are on your own in your first 6 months, every single case you encounter — from the vaccine appointment to the cow cesarean — will be different. Every single one. You will continue to learn and grow every day. When mistakes happen remember to see beyond the negative and choose to learn from them instead. Occasionally, they will even be your greatest moments of growth, your opportunity to become a better veterinarian. Carol S. Dweck, PhD put it best in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*: "the passion for stretching yourself and sticking to it, even (or especially) when it's not going well, is the hallmark of the growth mindset. This is the mindset that allows people to thrive during some of the most challenging times in their lives." And yes, your first year out will be one of the most challenging times in your life. But it will also be one of the most amazing.

What cannot be taught in school that you will experience in your first year of practice? Many things, and on some days you will feel like it's everything. You will never know how to be a veterinarian until you are one.

---

Associate, Stettler Veterinary Clinic in Central Alberta.

WCVM Graduate 2015

Use of this article is limited to a single copy for personal study. Anyone interested in obtaining reprints should contact the CVMA office ([hbroughton@cvma-acmv.org](mailto:hbroughton@cvma-acmv.org)) for additional copies or permission to use this material elsewhere.