Ten-minute chat

Louise O’Dwyer qualified as a veterinary nurse and is now a clinical director with CVS. She recently celebrated becoming doubly board certified.

What does being doubly board certified mean?
Being doubly board certified means I have gained Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS) status in both emergency and critical care (VTS(ECC)) and anaesthesia.

I am also the first UK nurse to hold a position on the Association of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT) board of regents (the governing body).

How did you get to where you are today?
I began my nursing career in 1997 in a small general practice clinic. After qualifying, I knew I wanted to expand my nursing skills through the diplomas in advanced veterinary nursing. In 2000, I moved to PetMedics and, after a short period working within the hospital, I was promoted to head nurse, and remained in this role for the next 11 years. During this time I gained the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing in both surgery and medicine.


In 2008, I decided I needed to develop the business side of my career. I enrolled on a part-time Masters in Business Administration (MBA). This was a complete change in educational content for me, having previously spent my time studying science-based qualifications, and never having taken a qualification in business or economics. I gained my MBA in 2011, which coincided with my appointment as clinical director at PetMedics. At the same time I completed the case books for the VTS(ECC), which I passed, and that allowed me to sit the examinations in Nashville, Tennessee, in 2010. That allowed me to become a member of the AVECCT. Since I also had an interest in anaesthesia, I decided to pursue VTS status in this subject area as well. In September last year (in Indianapolis) I sat and passed the VTS (anaesthesia) examinations, therefore becoming a member of the Academy of Veterinary Technician Anesthetists. At the conference where I sat my exam, I was also nominated by my peers onto the board of regents of AVECCT.

My second textbook, ‘Practical Emergency and Critical Care Veterinary Nursing’, which I co-authored with my colleague Paul Aldridge, was published in 2013, along with the BSAVA Pocketbook for Veterinary Nurses. My fourth book is due for publication this year, and I will have contributed to more than 30 book chapters and journal articles during the course of my career.

What does your job involve?
On a daily basis I am responsible for the running of the hospital, but I am also involved in patient care, particularly high-dependency patients and anaesthesia. I coordinate procedures to try to achieve a smooth flow of surgical patients through the operating theatre, assist with various procedures and also attempt to catch up on paperwork!

What do you like about your job?
I enjoy the variety and the caseload that the clinic receives. We see a large number of trauma patients, which gives me the opportunity to use my skills and interests in emergency and critical care, anaesthesia and wound management. Also the nature of our hospital means I can be very hands-on with cases.

What do you not like?
Rotas and staff recruitment. Rotas are the bane of my life and very time-consuming. Running a 24-hour clinic means that we have a high demand for staff at times when they may rather not be working, ie, weekends. Keeping everyone happy is an impossible task.

Why is your job important?
From the perspective of my role within PetMedics I am responsible for the day-to-day running of the hospital. With over 70 staff this can be demanding and stressful, but I try to do it in a stress-free, supportive manner, and this is reflected in my staff. The variability of emergency work means staffing for the ‘average’ is impossible, but I think ensuring my staff feel someone is there and will listen to them is important and helps build good relationships between all the staff.

What advice would you give to someone considering a similar career?
I know many people are of the opinion that veterinary nursing isn’t the greatest of careers but, if you are happy to put the effort in, you will reap the rewards. Veterinary nursing as a career has changed massively over the past decade, with nurses beginning to specialise in specific areas, and gain recognition in their own right. I think the profession will continue to evolve and offer more opportunities. It’s important to remain focused on your career and ensure you have a career you feel passionate about. If you are unhappy in your job, it is likely to impact on your home life, so enjoying what you do is hugely important.

What’s the best piece of advice you were ever given?
I’m not sure if this is actually advice given by someone else but, looking back on my career, I would say expect it to be like crazy paving – you can never plan exactly how its going to be, but you need to put the work in to ensure it goes in the direction you want it to.

What was your proudest moment?
Probably the publication of my first book. At that time I hadn’t done much writing, so completing it was a massive achievement.

If you weren’t working in the veterinary field, what would you be?
I would either like to work in interior design or in special effects designing prosthetics. I make models for veterinary skills workshops as a hobby and I think that it would make a wonderful career.

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