My week: Greta Manfrin

Greta Manfrin joined Vets Now through its Cutting Edge programme. Here, she describes a recent working week as the principal vet at an out-of-hours pet emergency clinic in Gillingham, Kent.

Sunday
When you work nights, it doesn’t matter what day it is – there are only days on and days off. This was my day off. At the moment much of my spare time is spent studying for a certificate in emergency and critical care; I focus on reviewing my learning to date.

Monday
Knowing I am about to face a run of nights, I stay in bed a bit longer than normal. Nights are busy, challenging, but one of the things I enjoy most is that each shift is different. It could never be described as dull.

Tonight is typical. Most of the work I do is clinical, which I love, but on top of that, there are e-mails to respond to, spreadsheets to check, locum cover to chase, meetings to attend, interviews and inductions to do. It’s satisfying, but busy.

During a rare quiet moment, I think about the great team we have and how much they count on me and Sam, the principal nurse, and how much we count on them. It’s all about building up relationships based on trust, carrying out training and communicating regularly. We wouldn’t be able to do what we do if we weren’t a great team.

Tuesday
Tonight’s caseload involves minor cases – bite wounds from dog attacks and vomiting and diarrhoea. Even out-of-hours vets deal with routine presentations occasionally!

Two cases keep us worried for most of the night. One is a puppy called Lucky with aspiration pneumonia. The other is a cat called Smudge, an unstable diabetic ketoacidosis. Thankfully, he doesn’t make it.

Within minutes, an RTA arrives, followed by a sezuiring cat. I feel the adrenaline rush; it keeps me going through a long shift. In this role, we are presented with interesting cases and new scenarios every night – it can be incredibly satisfying. By the time the clock strikes 1 am, I’m ready to scrub myself for a new surgery – a suspected foreign body. My colleague Clare reckons it will be a sock, Ryan says a peach stone.

In fact, it was a bouncy ball, so there are no winners. The surgery to remove it is delayed as the poorly dog with a huge liver mass.

When they come out, they delivered some sad news. Smudge had been put to sleep during the day. His condition had deteriorated and there was nothing else they could do for him. Lucky was still with us though. Come on you little fighter, I said to myself.

Friday
I have a few things to sort out before work. In a few months’ time, I’m moving to Scotland to work at Vets Now’s emergency and specialty hospital in Glasgow. I’m looking forward to it. The company’s values – releasing potential, innovation, caring and responsibility – are what we all aspire to and ‘releasing potential’ is my favourite. Vets Now looks after all of its people and there are lots of opportunities for those who are ambitious and want to progress.

As I sort through things, I recall a conversation with a vet friend who asked: ‘Oh Greta, when will you stop playing zombies and vampires and come to the angels and heroes side?’ At the time I laughed, but now I can’t imagine myself working in routine day time practice.

Once you get used to doing procedures like GDVs, blood transfusions, pericardiocentesis, traumas and many others, it’s hard to go back. We feel like heroes, ready to save the day whenever we’re called on.

I’m about to start a new adventure. Life is like a night shift – you never know what you’re going to get.

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