

Careers

‘My heart beats for animals’

Italian vet **Maria Flaminia Persichetti** combined her PhD studies of vectorborne infections in cats with a job in clinical practice. Her research recently won her a young scientist award from the European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases.

At school, I planned to become a surgeon like my father. However, as my heart beats for animals, I chose to study veterinary medicine and I’m now a specialist in infectious diseases.

Through working in practice, I discovered that I found internal medicine stimulating. I also wanted to do a PhD, but because of the economic situation in Italy, there is no support for young scientists wanting to embark on a research career. Therefore, for me, like many young veterinarians in Italy, private practice has been a complementary way of supporting my studies.

Personally, I feel that combining private practice and research has made me a better vet and has given me an all-round view of clinical issues.

My research was in the area of feline medicine and I found it fascinating. My tutor – Professor Maria Grazia Pennisi – was one of only a few women veterinarians at

a time when, in Italy, practitioners were mostly men. Apart from being an expert in feline medicine, she was my professional, scientific and personal mentor. She has been very encouraging.

My thesis on feline vectorborne pathogens and their associated parasites in southern Italy has deepened my knowledge in this area. Collaborating with colleagues in Spain and France, I improved the diagnostic techniques for detecting *Leishmania* and my work benefits cats and people.

My research also gave me the opportunity to work with the National Reference Centers for vectorborne pathogens at the Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale della Sicilia, Palermo, which is where I work today.

Professional choices

During my final-year as a vet student, I had decided that I should spend a year working abroad to improve my English – which would help me stay up-to-date and in contact with the international scientific community – but circumstances meant that I started my PhD instead.

I had to compromise. Although I missed out on the opportunity to improve my English, without my research, I wouldn’t have benefited from the stimulating scientific and laboratory experience I had.

Because my career hadn’t followed my original plan, it was an especially proud moment when my work was recognised by the European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases earlier this year.

Not only a vet

Last year I had a baby. Before my son was born, I was a workaholic,



With my son after the presentation of the 2018 ABCD Young Scientist Award at the International Society of Feline Medicine congress in Sorrento, Italy

but now life has changed. My daily schedule fits around his needs. I have given up working in practice, at least for the time being, and I work part-time at the lab.

Combining my professional life as a vet with the needs of my family is far more challenging than working in a lab, but it’s more satisfying too.

Would I recommend my job to a school leaver? Yes, of course I would. If you love animals and medical sciences, veterinary medicine is a wonderful job that is as intriguing as it is challenging.



Life has changed. Now my daily schedule fits around my son’s needs

Young scientist award

The European Advisory Board on Cat Diseases Young Scientist Award was created in 2008 and is presented to young scientists working in veterinary or biomedical sciences who have made an original contribution in the field of feline infectious diseases and/or immunology. It is funded by Boehringer Ingelheim.

MY CV

- Scientific Baccalauréat at the Lycée Chateaubriand de Rome
- Veterinary degree at the University of Messina
- PhD with ‘Europeus doctor’ at the University of Messina
- General practitioner certificate in emergency medicine and surgery in Cremona
- Specialist degree in infectious diseases at the University of Bari
- Veterinarian at the National Reference Center for *Anaplasma*, *Babesia*, *Rickettsia* and *Theileria* in Palermo, Sicily