

PRESIDENTIAL PRATTLINGS

February 2012

Writer's block. Writer's block?? No, it can't be; I've been writing for days on end. But instead of writing what I wanted to for my February article, I've been writing about how to calculate drug dosages, and taking pictures of me *attempting* to draw blood out of jugular, saphenous, and cephalic veins; I've been writing everything except my February article. So, let's just go there and I'll tell you about it, and then I can get on with it.

I am taking Veterinary Technician classes through Penn Foster, which is a self-paced distant-learning career school. How this works is, I sign up for the semester, they send me my books and learning materials for the first class, I read the books and study the material, attend webinars on line, take the tests on line, and when I pass the class, they send me the books for the next class. Repeat the above procedure. Repeat the procedure 5 or 6 times for the whole semester. When I finish the last class in the semester I turn around and study all the class material again and then take my proctors, which are the comprehensive finals for the semester, taken in the presence of a proctor who will keep me on the straight and narrow during the tests. The proctors consist of about twenty essay questions on each class from that semester. The questions are NOT multiple guess questions; they must be answered in a specified number of sentences or paragraphs. Some of the questions are on one definition or one obscure detail out of the whole text book; there's been more than once when I've read a question and exclaimed "What?! I don't even remember that word OR that subject!" But somehow I manage to write so many sentences about it. Linda Paul is my proctor; she has to sit around and amuse herself while I struggle with all those questions, and she can attest to how much I struggle. How I manage to pass the proctors I can't say. Well, yes I can. I do well enough throughout the semester in the classes that it carries me through a bad grade on the proctors.

Then at the end of the second semester (which is where I am) and fourth semester I have to do a Practicum, which is like an internship. I'm required to work at least 225 hours and up to 12 weeks in a veterinary clinic under the guidance and supervision of a licensed veterinarian and practice the day to day skills of a veterinary technician. Hence, calculating drug dosages and drawing blood. *Attempting* to draw blood. It seems to be harder for me than I would like.

There are 34 skills that I need to practice and become competent in. The skills cover things like learning how to operate the x-ray machine, positioning small animals for radiographs, and taking radiographs with the proper depth and contrast. I have to learn how to answer the phone, decide how quickly a pet needs to be seen—is it an emergency, or can it be scheduled for a later appointment—schedule appointments, take patient histories, trim nails, express anal

glands, restrain dogs and cats while another tech works on them, listen to heart and lung sounds, take temperatures and discern whether or not the heart and lung sounds and temperatures are normal, within normal limits, or abnormal.

I could go on and on and explain all 34 skills, but I've been working on those skills for several weeks and I'm still not done with even half of them. Some of the skills require research and writing an explanation on how to do something or about some aspect of a veterinary clinic. Some skills require photographs of me performing skills like drawing blood or restraining cats or dogs, removing them from cages, or applying bandages. The skills are designed to put my book learning to use and to teach me the physical aspects of the job of a vet tech. Some are very in-depth and some are kind of common sense things that can be answered pretty readily. But they all have to be presented in a professional manner, using correct terminology. When I complete a skills sheet I send it to Penn Foster and an instructor evaluates it. If it's not completed properly it's returned to me and I re-do it and send it in again.

For all the animals I have and all the time I spend with them, doctoring or examining them or taking care of them or working around them, I'm surprised at how little I seem to know. There's definitely a big difference between having them and being around them, and actually knowing how to treat them, and what all the different drugs and medications are used for. I've given shots and vaccinations for years to all my cats and dogs and equines, and doctored wounds and changed bandages whenever I had to, but when it comes to doing that stuff at the clinic, you'd think I'd never done it before at all! The pressure's on! Maybe it's because now I'm trying to know everything and learn everything about EVERYthing, instead of just paying attention to what's happening to which of my animals at that moment. At any rate, it's a whole new experience, and can be very time consuming.

The first two semesters and this first practicum are about small animals. The next two semesters will get more into large animals —cows, horses, goats, sheep and pigs—and exotics—pocket pets, rabbits, gerbils, birds and reptiles—and more in-depth about dogs and cats.

When I started this Vet Tech endeavor what I hoped to gain was the knowledge for myself that would enable me to take better care of my own animals, and possibly to help animals by volunteering at IHS or animal shelters around the area. Or, maybe get a part-time job for a little extra money. My goal is also to learn how to take care of equine injuries and emergencies in the back country and get our animals home safely as well as ourselves. So as soon as I can get all these small animal skills learned, I'll get to learning about the equines, and what to do with that big ol' Equine First Aid Kit we've got put together.

Back to the Skills Sheets.....

Safe trails!

See you on the next switchback.

Janine