



Jeanie Taylor RANA

Jeanie always knew she wanted to work with animals and started her animal nursing career at the age of 16. Her weekly salary was £8! Jeanie worked at various veterinary practices and then explored other jobs until her taking up her last post almost 20 years ago. She works in the NHS in south-east London.

Looking back to life in the 1970s – a RANA in Harrods

Sue Badger writes...

This is the first in a series of occasional features taken from old issues of the journal. The following article appeared in the forerunner of the VNJ, the *British Animal Nursing Auxiliaries Association Newsletter*, in May of 1979.

It was written at a time when veterinary nursing, and indeed the veterinary profession, was much less knowledgeable than it is today, and it serves to highlight many of the changes that have taken place over the last 30 years.

Harrods no longer has a pet department as such, and whilst it was considered perfectly acceptable at the time, the principle of 'duty of care' ensures that modern breeders would not dream of "popping a puppy on the train" to its new owner today. Indeed the transportation of animals by train has ceased with the demise of the old guard's van!

Reference is made within the article to hypoglycaemia as being a significant health issue, whilst the legislation concerning the supply and administration of drugs is now very different and our appreciation of the need to support the psychological needs of pets is, thankfully, far greater than it was over three decades ago.

In May 1979, Jeanie Taylor, RANA, wrote...

My training started at Miss Molly Freak's practice in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, as soon as I left school at 16. I chose to go to Berkshire College of Agriculture to do the residential six-month course from Autumn 1975 – Summer 1976 rather than evening classes.

Once qualified I went on to be head nurse at Kynoch & Logan's mixed practice in Yateley, Surrey, for a while, followed by periods at Young's Small Animal Practice in Ealing, Attimore Veterinary Hospital in Welwyn Garden City, House & Jackson in Blackmore, Essex, and finally Hamilton Veterinary Clinic in St John's Wood.

Departure from clinical nursing

After five years in general practice – two of them as a qualified nurse – I felt dissatisfied with my job and decided to turn my energies to another aspect of a career with animals.

After unsuccessfully applying abroad and to the Guide Dogs for the Blind

Association, one of the vets I was working with at the time mentioned that he knew the buyer of the pet shop at Harrods department store and was sure that she would be more than pleased to include a qualified RANA in her team. This is where I am employed at the present time.

My job does not include the selling of puppies and kittens, just their daily maintenance and care, which includes cleaning out pens, feeding, preparing food, grooming and cleaning pups and kittens every day, as well as nursing them through illness and medicating when necessary.

This may sound like a drop in status but I have learnt a lot about the characters and vulnerability of different breeds and their husbandry; of which I learnt precious little at the surgery. A lot more responsibility and trust is given to me, which I enjoy, as it is good to be fully appreciated at last.

Popular breeds

The most popular breeds seem to be the Lhasa Apso, Shih Tzu and Pekingese. Lhasas have to be watched

To cite this article use either
DOI: 10.1111/vnj.12106 or *Veterinary Nursing Journal* VOL 29 pp29-30

very carefully as they are very timid in a new environment and often distressed; although once settled, generally have a lovely temperament. Shih Tzus are lively little personalities and we have little problem with this breed.

Pekingese are the most emotionally stable characters I have come across. They are jolly little dogs that radiate self-confidence and we hardly have any problems at all with them.

We also regularly have Jack Russells, Dachshunds, Cairns, Scotties, Cocker Spaniels, Labradors, Irish Setters, Old English Sheepdogs, Rough Collies, Shelties, Bearded Collies, Westies, Springer Spaniels and Chows, as well as lesser-known breeds such as the Bichon Frise, Griffon Bruxellois, Papillon and, recently, Maremma (Italian Sheepdog).

We also occasionally have Yorkies, but the toy breeds easily succumb to hypoglycaemia so are infrequently displayed to the public. Breeds we do not keep are Alsations [German Shepherd dogs] which never settle in the shop, Beagles because we have too many complaints about their escapades following sale (I should know as I have two of them myself!), and Chihuahuas which are also susceptible to hypoglycaemia.

Cats are not much of a problem except for vaccination reactions, especially the intra-nasal type, although Feliflu appears to have been a real breakthrough for us. The main breeds we keep are Persians, including colour-points, Chinchillas and Birmans. We no longer keep Siamese, because they are so highly strung, nor Foreign Shorthairs and Rexes because of their destructiveness.

Caring for puppies

I always thought that puppies were incredibly resilient, but I soon learnt that they should be treated like babies – taking time to care for them, psychologically as well as clinically. Stress is the biggest problem that we face so let me outline what befalls a pup when it is brought to us.

As far as possible we encourage breeders to bring the pups to us by car. However, owing to circumstances such as distance and car availability, some do have to be sent via British Rail (which usually is reliable). They are taken from the warmth

of their mother and litter-mates, put into crates and spend long hours on a train. At this stage bad weather conditions may take their toll and, in fact, earlier this year we refused pups if they were to be sent by rail because the cold climate was causing so many problems.

At the end of their journey, they are transferred to a taxi and finally end up in Harrods, having experienced many different noises, smells, temperatures and so on. They are bewildered and still have to cope with yet another unfamiliar environment.

Every animal received is vetted as soon as possible and, if passed, is also vaccinated at the same time, as pups are at least eight weeks old on arrival, no younger. (Kittens are also subjected to the UV light test for ringworm and are fully vaccinated when they arrive, as they must be at least 12 weeks of age).

Then they are placed in isolation for at least 24 hours before meeting the public. They also have to adjust to a new diet, which is composed of freshly cooked chicken, beef or fish, with fine puppy meal and/or rice.

The main signs of stress appear to be:

- lethargy
- persistent, often distressed, vocalization
- anorexia
- diarrhoea, often with signs of straining and fresh drops of blood, followed by vomiting.

In some cases, these quickly lead to haemorrhage from the rectum often indicative of intussusception, which may result in death. These symptoms do not necessarily occur on arrival, as signs of stress may not be apparent until two or three days later.

Combating the problem of stress

Communication with the breeder is very important, and we ask them to make every effort to subject their puppies to normal household noise. Generally, the best balanced pups are home-reared.

We were experiencing severe stress problems with pups from a Lhasa breeder because she lived in the quiet of

the countryside. She now subjects her pups to bursts of TV noise which has made a noticeable improvement in their confidence.

We maintain a high standard of hygiene and have the following drugs readily available:

- phenobarbitone – sedates distressed pups and boosts the appetite in cases of anorexia
- Donnatal – slows down the action of bowels in diarrhoea cases
- sulphamethazine – a sulphonamide and anti-diarrhoeal agent
- kaolin and morphine – antidiarrhoeal agent used for larger breeds of dog, but not used for kittens
- specific treatment is then given to individual cases as necessary.

I would add that all these drugs are prescribed for use and approved by our vet.

As previously stated, all newcomers are put into isolation for 24 hours. For the first two or three days they are fed on a bland diet of chicken and rice; at night this is supplemented with a fine puppy meal. Small breeds also receive glucose in their drinking water.

Cow's milk is never administered as we find this often results in diarrhoea, which adds to the stress problem. Anorectics are tempted to eat with strained baby foods, Farex and Complan.

The best way to keep a tag on how the pups are reacting is by taking their temperatures daily. This has proved an invaluable practice as a high temperature is often the first sign that a pup is succumbing to stress.

The future

Although the pups are generally well-reared, breeders often miss certain health problems such as ear mites, lice, monorchidism and umbilical hernias.

The pet trade has never had a good name; but recently it has fallen further into disrepute and it is regrettable that so many breeders and pet shop owners lack any knowledge of husbandry. Is it not time that some form of qualification is necessary before allowing people to set up pet shops or breeding kennels? 