



Charlotte Barnett SVN

Charlotte Barnett is a third year SVN studying at Middlesex University. She is proud to be a student hedgehog ambassador. She has worked at a number of first opinion practices and has a passion for nursing wildlife. After qualifying she hopes to complete the advanced programme in veterinary nursing and exotic species and eventually work in a wildlife hospital. Email: CB1364@live.mdx.ac.uk.

Things I wish I had known in year one of university

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When I started my degree in veterinary nursing in 2018, I had high expectations of the three years ahead of me. Having received an informative induction from my university and completing four weeks of work experience in a veterinary practice, I felt ready and raring to go onto my placement. Upon reflection of my experiences however, it is clear that there are many elements I wish I had known right from the beginning. I decided to write this article in the aim to help prepare future student veterinary nurses (SVNs) for their degrees.

Vetlife – call 0303 040 2551 (24-hour helpline)
Mind – call 0300 123 3393
Samaritans – call 116 123 (24-hour helpline)
SHOUT – text SHOUT to 85258

Figure 1. Available helplines.

good to be aware of helplines that are available (Figure 1).

Stress – it is normal

Stress is one of the most taboo, and often ignored topics in modern society. With assignments, case reports, exams, endless amounts of required reading, dissertation and placements to complete it is inevitable that all SVNs will feel some level of stress throughout their studies. A survey carried out by Dig In and The Insight Network (2019) found that out of 35,654 university students across the United Kingdom, (87.7%) reported struggling with feelings of anxiety.

From a personal standpoint, I was unaware of the magnitude of stress that I would experience during my training. For this reason, I feel that it is imperative to discuss and make future SVNs aware that stress is normal and perfectly acceptable. I feel strongly that more emphasis should be made on mental health support networks within veterinary nursing degree programmes.

There are many support networks out there including family, friends, tutors, university support systems and colleagues. From personal experience, it can be beneficial to discuss your feelings with other people including other SVNs who will likely be feeling a similar way. Nobody should have to suffer in silence. Along the way I have also become aware of a support community called Vetlife, who are free for veterinary professionals and students to contact if in need of additional support. It is

There are many ways of doing things in practice

For most degree SVNs, it is inevitable that you will do some moving around in terms of practice placements. This may be a decision that you have made yourself or one that is out of your hands. I have worked across five different practices during my degree and will shortly be moving once again for my final placement block. I feel that working across many practices has been both challenging and beneficial to my development as a nurse. I was unaware prior to placement that veterinary nursing is often practice-specific and can differ due to individual protocol. This can initially be confusing and disheartening to an SVN when changing practices. However, being able to adapt to change as nurses will only allow us to improve our skills base and nursing knowledge. This experience along with evidence-based literature can help us to make informed decisions on patient care when we qualify as registered veterinary nurses.

Dogs and cats are not our only patients

The focus of our veterinary nursing training is to manage the most commonly encountered species in practice - dogs and cats. I have a personal passion for wildlife and hope to steer my nursing skills further into the animal kingdom. Over the course of my degree, I have learnt that wildlife and exotic-specific nursing opportunities are rare,



▲ Figure 2. European Hedgehog.

therefore I took it upon myself to seek out opportunities to gain experience and learn more about wildlife (Figure 2).

I came across an opportunity online to become a student hedgehog ambassador. In this role over the past few months, I have led a campaign with the aim to make my university campus 'hedgehog-friendly'. Sadly, hedgehogs in the United Kingdom are currently on the Red List for Britain's Mammals (Mathews & Harrower, 2020). Half of the countryside population and a third of the urban population have been lost since the Millennium (Hedgehog



▲ Figure 3. Hedgehog friendly status.

Street, 2020). This is why it is so important for us as a nation to help hedgehogs. The campaign was completed in January 2021 and I am happy to announce that Middlesex University are now a bronze-accredited Hedgehog Friendly Campus (Figure 3). I plan to continue campaigning for the protection of hedgehogs and achieve silver and gold accreditation in the near future. This is a fantastic opportunity for

students interested in wildlife, as you are able to learn more about hedgehogs, utilise the campus to help the diminishing population, spread the word to educate others about hedgehogs and obtain a CV reference for your hard work. The Hedgehog Friendly Campus programme is funded by the British Hedgehog Preservation Society, a registered charity that is dedicated to protecting and helping hedgehogs native to the United Kingdom. Students who are interested in getting involved should email the Hedgehog Friendly Campus team at: info@hedgehogfriendlycampus.co.uk.

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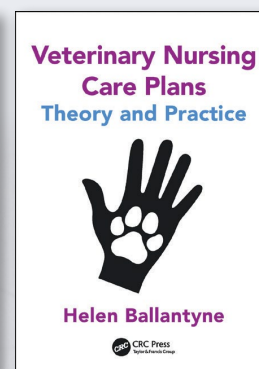
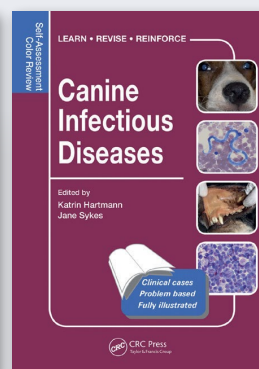
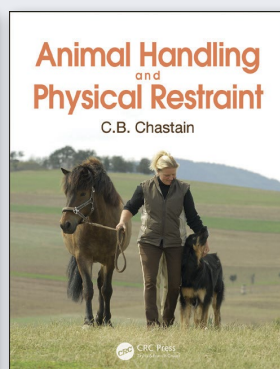
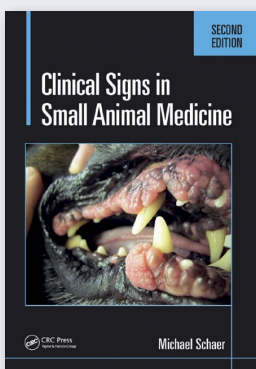
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