



Laura Richards BSc (Hons) VN

Laura is a newly qualified veterinary nurse, graduating from Hartpury University with a BSc (Hons) degree in 2019. She currently works in a busy, first opinion practice in South Wales where she is developing a keen interest in surgical nursing. She is a BVNA council member where she hopes to play a part in shaping the future of veterinary nursing.

She has just started her surgical nursing certificate which she is really enjoying, is passionate about veterinary nursing and channels this enthusiasm through her use of social media, aiming to educate and inspire other members of the veterinary industry and the public. You may have seen her on Instagram or Facebook as 'Laura Richards RVN'.

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From SVN to RVN: my journey

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For every student veterinary nurse (SVN), the prospect of finishing your studies whether it be by university or college and qualifying as a registered veterinary nurse (RVN) is incredibly exciting. Amongst the feelings of excitement and joy, this sometimes can be mixed with feelings of anxiety and worry. The thought of going from this cocoon of constant study, revision and exams to working full time in the big wide world (sometimes in your first ever veterinary nurse position) as an RVN can be daunting. I want to share with you my journey from SVN to RVN and how I got to where I am today, twelve months into my RVN venture.

Where it all began...

The day I found out that I had gained the A-Level results that I required to get into Hartpury to do vet nursing was one of the most memorable days I have to date. I was thrilled to say the least, and I spent the whole day on cloud nine. It is fair to say that I embraced every part of university life, from the social aspects to volunteering to do lambing in the spring and helping out on the yard. So many opportunities came my way, and I even completed some work experience in a local equine hospital. Fast forward to 2019 and I was completing my final year of university. This year was by far the most testing, with the pressure of getting my first RVN job looming and the stress of dissertation – it was all getting very real.

Getting my first RVN job

I actually landed my first 'RVN' job in late June of 2019, I was taken on technically as an SVN still (my graduation wasn't until October of that year) but with university finishing in June/July I wanted to get myself into the big wide world as soon as possible. I found getting a job rather easy, it is surprising how many practices want RVNs. I had a brief idea of what sort of practice I wanted, which made looking for a job a lot easier. I knew I wanted quite a busy first opinion practice, preferably that does its own out of hours (OOH). I wanted this because I believed that this would give me

the perfect opportunity as a newly qualified RVN to gain experience in different fields of veterinary nursing, including complex inpatient nursing, complex surgical cases, emergencies, nurse consults and everything in between.

Understandably, not every SVN would get the anxious feelings that I did, but if you did, then you are NOT alone. If you're reading this right now thinking, YES, I had or have the exact same feelings as you did, then I have compiled a little guide of how I coped with the anxiety of going from SVN to RVN.

Build (or use) a support network

I was lucky in the respect that I already had a fab support network around me. I cannot tell you how important it is. It is SO easy with anxiety to lock up and hide yourself away, I have been there and done that. But you really must resist that urge. If you build a support network of various people in your life, it should make it a lot easier. For example, if it is something that you know your partner or your family would not quite understand or be able to help with, utilise your lecturers or tutors at university. It does not mean that your family or partner is any less supportive or helpful to you, it just allows you to get the help that is most relevant and best to you. It is also handy when you start your new job to suggest to your management team (if they don't suggest it to you first) that you have a 'mentor' in practice, ideally an RVN. You don't necessarily have to label it as your mentor if you don't want to, but just having that 'someone' in practice who you can go to with any problems you may be facing in work.

I want to also say how supportive the Instagram community is too. There are lots of other RVNs, SVNs, Vets and ACAs/VNAs on Instagram who are publishing their journeys, so I would recommend having a little look. There are plenty of amazing veterinary professionals on there who share their tips, tricks, tales and

advice, and their inbox is always open if you need any support.

Make use of free CPD sessions or webinars

You are probably thinking I've just finished my studies, why should I be doing more learning so soon? Well honestly, going to in house CPD sessions and attending free webinars really helped me. The more knowledge and skills I had, the more confident I felt. For example, even though I knew how to do CPR and what to do in a 'crash' situation, the practice I work at is extremely busy and deals with lots of emergencies, and we have had several crashing dogs that have come through the doors. This was really stressing me out that I felt inadequately equipped with knowledge, so doing a free webinar on it helped me.

On this topic, if you can access any sort of newly qualified RVN programmes then I would recommend doing this. I am currently enrolled on the IVC Evidensia nurse academy, which is specifically designed for newly qualified RVNs to support them through their first year of being a qualified veterinary nurse. The nurse academy means I get an 'in-practice' mentor, and an external IVC mentor too. Additionally, it provides RVNs with SO much CPD too across the twelve months of being an academy nurse. So, if your first job is at an IVC owned practice, it is definitely worth enquiring about this. Equally to this, the BVNA provide a LOT of CPD for nurses,

which is really accessible to SVNs and on a wide variety of topics.

Learn to reflect

I think the word 'reflection' to a lot of RVNs and SVNs is deemed to be a bit of a 'taboo' word. The idea of reflecting for some nurses seems to be laborious and monotonous – but this is not the case. Reflecting does not have to be written neatly out at length on Word or require hours and hours of inputting/thought. Simply, just writing a few squiggly notes in a notebook can be classed as reflecting. The thing with reflection is you can do it however you want to do it, if you want to do a big log of reflections you can, if you just want to write down a couple of sentences you can. But practicing reflection can REALLY be a useful tool to any RVN at any stage in their career. It helps to identify strengths and weaknesses and consequently allows you to improve your practice. In my third year of university I was taught a reflective module where I had to produce a reflective assignment, although I hated it at the time, it has taught me a lot, and allowed me to get into the reflective mindset.

I find reflecting really valuable as a newly qualified RVN, I keep a log (just in a notebook) of a few things that went really well, and a few things that didn't go so well then just make a few notes of how I could improve next time. Reflecting isn't daunting and the sooner you can master it the better.

Allow yourself some time to breathe...

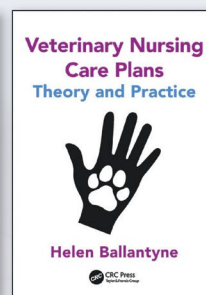
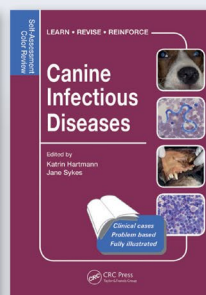
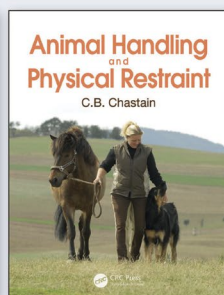
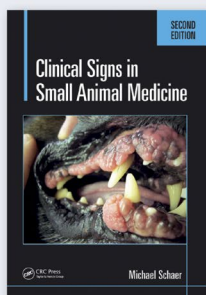
Aside from the busy-ness of newly qualified life where you are adjusting to potentially a new practice and new job, as well as getting used to being an RVN, it is so important to have some time for yourself. When your life is particularly hectic, that is when it is even more important to ensure you take some breathing space and allow yourself to have some down time.

Being a veterinary nurse in general can sometimes be stressful, let alone having the additional pressure of being newly qualified. Ensure in your busy schedule that you pencil in some time to do some self-care activities, even if it is just baking a cake, or watching an episode of your favourite TV show. It may be cliché, but a diary will be your absolute bible if you use it correctly. I write up my diary schedule for the week ahead, ensuring I give myself time for my extra projects that I have, but also time to go to the gym or watch my favourite TV programme.

Your journey from being an SVN to RVN is one of the most exciting times of your career, and the time that you have been working so hard for is finally here. Embrace every minute, consider every opportunity, and remember how hard you have worked to get here. But most of all, remember to be kind to yourself.

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