



**Lynne Kerrigan MA Ed Cert Ed RVN
FE Assistant Head of School
for Veterinary Nursing at
Myerscough College**

Lynne has been working in veterinary practice for over 20 years as a head nurse and assessor. In 2004 she joined Myerscough College as a lecturer in Veterinary Nursing and in 2013 took up the position of FE Assistant Head of School for Veterinary Nursing. Her role involves overseeing and coordinating the day-to-day running of the FE course provision combined with teaching across a range of courses from the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing through to BSc (Hons) and Advanced Diploma level.

Lynne completed her Certificate in Education in 2007, gained a Master's degree in Education in 2011 and completed the ILM Award in Leadership and Management Skills in 2016.

Her particular areas of interest include senior and palliative/hospice care nursing, bereavement care, nursing of exotic species and all aspects of surgical nursing and she regularly delivers CPD and contributes articles to veterinary nursing journals on these topics as well as peer-reviewing articles for a number of journals.

E-mail: lkerrigan@myerscough.ac.uk

DOI: 10.1080/17415349.2019.1584069

© 2019 British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA)

Veterinary nursing: from practice to teaching

Lynne Kerrigan

**School of Veterinary Nursing, Myerscough College, Bilsborrow, Preston,
Lancashire PR3 0RY, UK**

ABSTRACT: Considering a move into teaching is something that many veterinary nurses contemplate. However, a lack of understanding regarding what exactly the role entails may prevent them from taking it any further. This article will detail the journey of an RVN from practice to teaching and a subsequent managerial role within a large veterinary nursing teaching institution.

Keywords: Teaching; knowledge; rewarding

In the beginning

I have always been fascinated by “blood and gore” and as a child spent hours in front of the television with my mum watching real-life hospital shows to get a fix! This obsession with blood and a love of animals led me into the obvious career path of veterinary nursing.

Veterinary practice was rather different 20 years ago and when I was working as a “nurse” for eight years, totally unaware of the training programme available. A move to another practice which employed qualified nurses introduced me to the concept of qualified status and this was something I aspired to achieve. I enrolled on the RCVS Level 3 Veterinary Nursing course at Myerscough College in 1998 and qualified in 2000. To this day, I can still recall the anxious wait for my OSCE results. Having worked as a “nurse” for so long prior to attending college, I wrongly assumed that I would find the course easy; I had after all, been doing the job. The truth was, and I believe still is, that without adequate training and continual learning, “you do not know what you do not know” and that is a concern and a reason why I am a passionate advocate for RVN training and continuing professional development.

Developing a passion for teaching

I thoroughly enjoyed my years in veterinary practice, working in both

small and mixed animal practices as a Head Nurse and Assessor (now Clinical Coach). Achieving my D32/33 assessor award and working with SVNs on what was then the portfolio, now the NPL (and the green book in my day!), generated my interest in teaching. I found that I enjoyed sharing my knowledge and experience, and I gained pleasure from seeing my students learn new skills. A conversation with my student's college Internal Verifier, Wendy Nevins (the now president of the BVNA) led me to take the scary step to apply for a teaching position at Myerscough College ... so I guess I should say thank you, Wendy! I am extremely proud to call myself a Myerscough Nurse and so was very pleased to be offered the position of a full-time lecturer in veterinary nursing, which I took up in 2004.

Life in a teaching role

For those considering a move to teaching, I would say if sharing your knowledge and skills is something you enjoy and gain pleasure from, then I would give it a go. However, if you fancy a move to teaching with regular hours and long holidays because you are a little bit jaded with practice life and a move away from shift work, then this is certainly not the career for you. The reality of teaching is very different to how it is sometimes portrayed, with the first few years in particular being very demanding. Knowing your subject is one thing, but transferring the knowledge from your mind into the

minds of 20 or more eager learners is very different indeed. It is important to remember that teaching involves far more than simply talking at the front of the class (Figure 1) – learning does not happen incidentally, it has to be carefully planned (Jones, 2005). Such planning encompasses preparing lectures, generating student resources, designing and delivering practical sessions (Figure 2), setting and marking assignments and exams, creating schemes of work and devising individual learning plans, as well as the administrative side of things such as monitoring attendance, tracking results and maintaining student data. Petty (2014) suggested that novice teachers should aim to use their time as efficiently as possible by saving worksheets and lesson plans from year to year, further stating that while organisation saves a great deal of time, it will likely still take two or three years for a new teacher to begin to appreciate the resources they will require.

The good thing is that you are not alone. I am fortunate to work within a very supportive team. Team support, along with the knowledge gained from your teacher training course, will assist you greatly. There is no greater acknowledgement that you are doing a good job than when you

mark a class test and see far more right answers than wrong ones!

With regards to teacher training courses, many teaching institutions will employ you without an official teaching qualification, as part of the terms of your employment will be to complete either the Certificate or Post-Graduate Certificate in Education while in post; this is what I did. For those of you who might want to “dip a toe in the water” before committing to teaching full time, a number of colleges offer the Certificate in Education and Training Preparatory (formerly PTLLS), which is a course designed to give people a taste of teaching and to prepare them for the role. Undertaking such a course in conjunction with doing some guest lecture spots at your local animal care/veterinary nursing college will give you a taste of what the profession is really like – a “try before you buy”.

In 2013, I was offered and accepted the role of Further Education (FE) Assistant Head of School at the college. This role involves overseeing and coordinating the day-to-day running of the FE course provision, liaising with the Awarding Organisation, internal verification of examinations and assignments and organising promotional events, combined with

teaching across a range of courses from the Level 3 Diploma in veterinary nursing through to the BSc (Hons) and Advanced Diploma level. This is a demanding and challenging role and no two days are the same; however, I thoroughly enjoy the challenges that this brings.

The reality of teaching is that it is tough, mentally exhausting and technically demanding. The flip side, however, is that it is also hugely rewarding. I would personally recommend undertaking the role of a Clinical Coach prior to considering a move to teaching. While not essential, from personal experience I found that the close working relationship formed with SVN's gave me an insight into the challenges that learners face. It also introduced me to the concept of not all techniques working for all students. While some students may be happy for you to show them a skill once and then want to have a try for themselves, others will need to be shown a number of times and may perhaps prefer to read around the subject first. Such differences in learning preferences between your students serves as a good introduction to how adaptable you are required to be as a teacher in order to cater for the different learning preferences within your classroom. Within your time as a student or in your role as Clinical Coach, you may have been asked to complete a VARK questionnaire. VARK is an acronym for visual, aural, read/write and kinaesthetic, and is just one of many learning style assessments designed to assist learners to think about the way in which they learn. Fleming and Baume (2006) suggested its use as a starting place for a conversation among teachers and learners about learning preferences. This is in congruence with Bates (2016) who suggested that learning style assessments can be utilised by teachers in order to get a feel for the learning styles among their cohort, remind them not to only use materials that have a strong bias toward one particular learning preference and finally to assist them to work with learners who have a strong preference for any one learning style to help them develop other styles.

Teaching requires you to be a coach, mentor, assessor, role model and counsellor on occasion, all skills you will have been developing within your role as a Clinical Coach. When considering embarking on a career within teaching, do not think for a minute that the students are the only ones who are learning. I have achieved things that I never thought possible when I first entered the teaching profession over 14 years ago. Such achievements include gaining my Certificate in Education, ILM Leadership

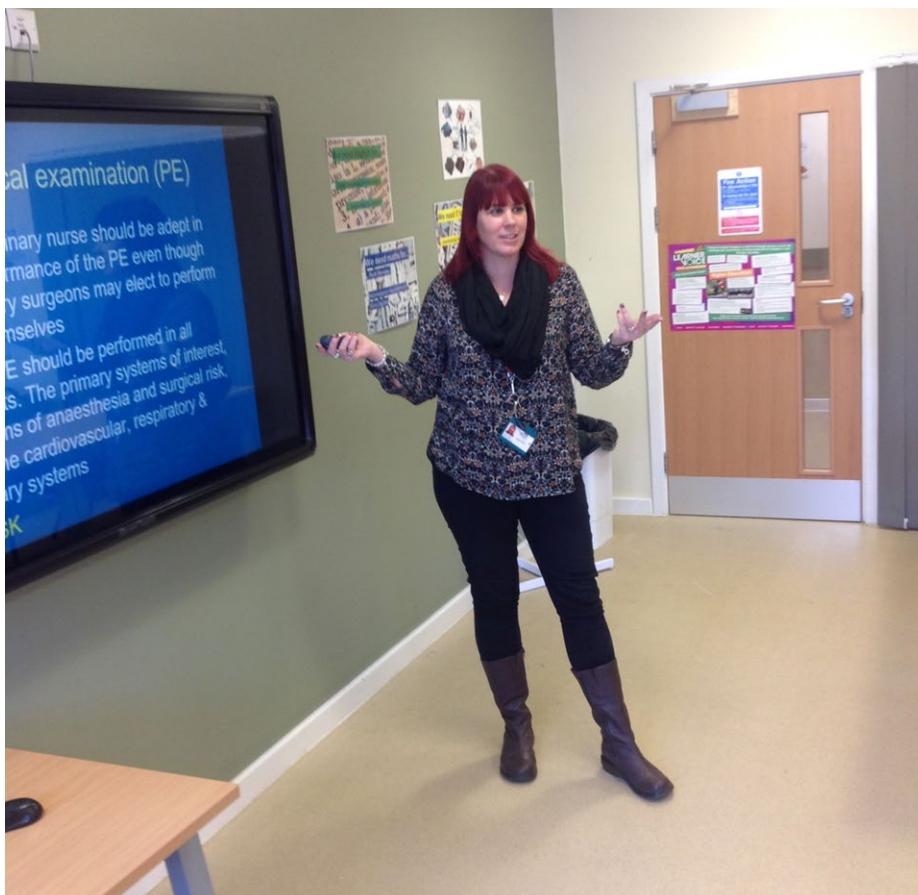


Figure 1. Teaching requires more than simply talking at the front of the class – learning must be carefully planned.



Figure 2. Planning encompasses preparing and facilitating practical sessions as well as lectures.

and Management Award, Manager as Coach Award, Internal Quality Assurance Award and a Master's Degree in Education with Distinction. My knowledge has grown immensely as a result of this and I now

have the confidence to publish articles in veterinary nursing journals, deliver external CPD courses, act as a consultant for a number of awarding institutions and serve as an Editorial Board member for the VNJ.

Do I miss practice?

I am frequently asked by students if I miss working in veterinary practice. While I do miss the reward of nursing a sick animal back to health or the feeling that I have supported a client through a traumatic experience, such feelings are replaced with the joy of seeing a student who doubts their ability starting to recognise their potential. I often receive emails from past students informing me that they are undertaking additional qualifications or have just accepted their dream job. I am like an anxious parent on OSCE results day and a proud parent on graduation day. It may sound clichéd, but as a teacher you become a part of your student's journey to achieving their full potential, and that is a great privilege.

The VN Futures project means that there are exciting times ahead for the veterinary nursing profession and working within education enables you to be a part of shaping the future generation of RVNs. I look forward to seeing how the profession develops during my next 20 years!

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

References

- Bates, B. (2016). *Learning theories simplified*. London: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Fleming, N., & Baume, D. (2006). Learning styles again: VARKing up the right tree. *Educational Developments*, 7(4), 4–7.
- Jones, C. A. (2005). *Assessment for learning*. London: Learning and Skills Development Agency.
- Petty, G. (2014). *Teaching today* (5th ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.



**The Daphne
Shipman
Benevolent Fund**
Supporting BVNA Members
and their families

Funds donated to support BVNA Member charity 'The Daphne Shipman Benevolent Fund'

BVNA are delighted to announce during 2018 the funds raised for supporting the BVNA members charity totalled £ 1955.15

The Daphne Shipman Benevolent Fund was set up in memory of Daphne Shipman, who was BVNA Congress Chief Steward for many years. Daphne was loved by all who knew her and sadly lost her fight against cancer in June 1999.

The fund has been made available to BVNA members with the objective of supporting members, their spouses, relations or dependents who are in need, hardship or distress.

Every application is carefully considered by its trustees. If you are or know of someone who may require assistance, please visit the BVNA website for more information

<https://www.bvna.org.uk/advice/daphne-shipman-benevolent-fund>