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# In pursuit of excellence

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**ABSTRACT:** Veterinary nurse, Scott Parry, has had an interesting and challenging career, culminating in the receipt of two separate awards at the BSAVA Congress 2013. In this article he outlines his pathway to success and emphasises the importance of adopting a professional approach, combined with a passion for customer service and the welfare of animals.

## First steps

I started my veterinary nursing career in 1992 following a work experience placement at a mixed practice in South Wales. It was a busy practice and I gained a great deal of valuable experience – and also met my future wife, who joined the practice as a new graduate veterinary surgeon.

My training began here and I attended Pencoed College on day-release whilst completing the practical aspects via the 'Green Book' – for those of you old enough to remember! I moved to a non-training practice part-way through my training, so this was put on hold for a number of years.

My new job was in a start-up practice, and being part of a very small team I gained invaluable knowledge, which would prove to be useful in the years to come.

I married in 1999 and moved to Birmingham from Wales in 2001 as my wife was starting a job at the RSPCA Animal Hospital. I secured a post in private practice and it was here that I finally completed my training – by now battling with the NVQ portfolio – and qualified in 2004. I progressed to head nurse position and enjoyed this role very much.

## Welfare experience

In 2006, I joined my wife at the RSPCA Hospital and worked as a staff nurse – mentoring and training a large group of nurses. This was where our passion for the RSPCA and its animal welfare work began. Working in such a large hospital with numerous staff and inpatient numbers – regularly into three figures – was very intense but offered the equivalent of many years' experience condensed into a much smaller timescale.

 **Figure 1.** The front view of Bridge Veterinary Surgery



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I feel it would benefit all nurses to spend part of their career working in the charity sector because you experience extremes of both animal and human welfare situations that you may never encounter in a private practice setting.

It had always been a dream for both my wife and me to one day own our own practice, and the opportunity to purchase a small animal practice in Somerset was presented to us at the end of 2007. We took over ownership of Bridge Veterinary Surgery on 1 January 2008 (Figure 1).

## Realising the dream

The practice is currently staffed by one vet (my wife Ann), one RVN (me) and two lay staff (Julia and Jenny) who have been with us from the start (Figure 2). We have made many changes during our time here but have strived to maintain the personal and friendly service which is, sadly, often lost as practices grow.

We have invested heavily in equipment – our purchase of digital X-ray equipment has been a delight and one that we would find hard to live without – and extending our premises in order to offer a comprehensive service within a single-site, first-opinion practice. We are RCVS accredited and are proud to be able to offer our clients a 24-hour service, seven days a week.

Both my wife and I undertake all of our own on-call work at present. We feel it is extremely important for our clients to be seen in their 'usual' practice at a time when they may be very worried or concerned about their pets in an emergency situation.

Our whole ethos is about providing a caring, honest service in a pleasant and happy environment – with animal welfare at the forefront of our minds. We have a very close-knit team and Julia and Jenny are pivotal in giving the right impression when clients contact our practice. They are both well qualified to carry out their roles; but most importantly, they share our passion for customer service and the welfare of animals.

## Reconnecting with roots

Soon after moving to Somerset, we approached the local RSPCA (North Somerset Branch) to offer our professional services. We felt that we had an understanding and empathy for the



Figure 2. The practice team (from left) Julia, Jenny, Ann & Scott

challenges and work with which they were involved. We have built a close relationship and are now the consulting practice for the re-homing centre and we are both trustees of the North Somerset Branch.

Our work at the RSPCA Hospital in Birmingham allowed us insight into the difficult decisions that are forced upon our colleagues on a daily basis in the charity sector. Pragmatic decisions are not always the easiest to make in an emotional environment, but must be made with a careful balance between animal welfare and funds available in the current challenging economic climate.

On a lighter note, I am an active member of the fund-raising committee and was delighted to be instrumental in raising the money to purchase an agility course

for the Centre – this not only gives the dogs' physical challenges, but also mental stimulation which is so important in a kennel environment.

My inspiration for this project was a group of collies that were boarded for many months whilst awaiting a court case to decide their future. Dogs such as these may be kept in a boarding facility for indeterminate lengths of time, and hence may suffer kennel stresses which can have a detrimental impact on their physical and mental well-being.

Their time within kennels also impacts on their 're-homeability'. I have been very fortunate to be able to work with some severely emotionally traumatised dogs and rehabilitate them to be able to live happy lives in a domestic environment.

Figure 3. Hope at the beginning of her journey to recovery





Figure 4. Hope in fine fettle

### Where there's hope...

My most memorable case, however, was working with a dog named 'Hope'. She was found by the side of the road in a cardboard box and taken to our local RSPCA offices that hurriedly transferred her to the nearest veterinary surgery, which stabilised her overnight. She was transferred to our surgery the following day. This was the beginning of my most rewarding nursing case to date.

When Hope arrived, she weighed just 7.7kg (we guessed her breed as a Boxer cross), was the most emaciated dog we had ever seen still alive, and was unable to move anything but her eyes (Figure 3).

Figure 6. Scott (left) receives the Ceva Welfare Nurse of the Year Award



Figure 5. Scott & Ann (centre) receive the Petplan Practice of the Year Award

She became my constant companion, needing turning every two hours, day and night, and syringe feeding with a very carefully calculated nutritional programme until she was strong enough, first to lap and then eat solid foods.

As she was so weak, initially she was toileting on 'puppy pads' where she lay, but amazed us all by alerting us that she needed to toilet as soon as she was able to vocalise. This was long before she could even stand or support the weight of her own head – she preferred to be carried outside and never failed to perform.

Her progress and will to survive were spectacular and she gained a whole 'following' on Facebook, where we logged her progress. She even appeared on ITV's *Daybreak*. She continued to improve over the following weeks, needing massage and physiotherapy to re-educate her limbs and she never once complained. She lived with us at home and became part of our family until she was finally fit enough to re-home (Figure 4). This was the most difficult part of the whole process for us.

It would have been the most natural reaction to keep her, but as her mobility improved and zest for life developed, it was clear that our older, three-legged collie was finding her long-term presence stressful. We already had a happy family of six dogs and felt it unfair to upset the balance.

Hope is a truly remarkable dog and deserves the best life possible after all she has had to endure. The most fantastic

home came forward and she settled in very quickly with a new family of three other dogs. She visits often, now weighs nearly 20kg, and is unrecognisable from the pathetic creature originally presented to us.

Our first five years as practice owners have been very rewarding and have culminated in the honour of our receiving the Petplan Practice of the Year Award 2013 (Figure 5). This means a great deal to us as it is a reflection of the esteem in which our clients hold us. We were surprised and delighted to be informed that we were in the final, which was to be judged by eminent members of our profession.

The results were announced in a ceremony at Birmingham Town Hall at the beginning of April and we were stunned to be the winners! This was a double delight for me as the night before I had been presented with the CEVA Welfare Nurse of the Year Award for my work with the local RSPCA (Figure 6).

Being a RVN in the 21st Century is an evolving role. Our recognition within the profession and eyes of the general public is increasing, although we still have a long way to go. I am still in the minority as a male veterinary nurse and continue to 'educate' clients that I am not – nor wish to become – a veterinary surgeon; and that veterinary nursing is a career in its own right. I am very fortunate to be a partner in a successful veterinary practice and have the support of my wife, clients and staff. Long may it continue! 