

# First Year Veterinarian

## An Ode to Mentorship in the California Veterinary Community

By Amber Andersen, DVM

**Dr. Amber Andersen, a 2009 Western University graduate, is sharing her experiences during her first year as a veterinarian.**

Alright, it's true...new grads always hear voices in their heads. While in veterinary school, we learned as experienced doctors monitored our every decision and gave guidance. Now in practice the choices for patient care are all our own. I find myself hearing voices of veterinary mentors from the past guiding me on imaging interpretation, surgical skills and client communication. Mentors have directed me since a young age. This month's article is an ode to mentorship in the California veterinary community -- a letter of humble gratitude for doctors who take their time to influence future careers by guiding students. It's also a reflection of mentorship experiences with CVMA members and thanks for your energy, resources, patience and encouragement.

Children who aim to be veterinarians want to watch you give injections, listen to your stethoscope or see the rest of the hospital. Often I am busy and feeling a time crunch when they make these requests. Still, through the stress, I remember Dr. Helen Green of Mission Valley Pet Clinic. She was our warm, empathetic family veterinarian while I was growing up in San Diego. At age 12 she allowed me to take a tour of her clinic because I wanted to be a veterinarian someday. Dr. Green always inquired of my progress and offered encouragement!

My first job in the veterinary field was for family friend Dr. Greg Smith of East County Large Animal Practice. The summer before my senior year in high

school I filed medical records, filled prescriptions and answered phones. I was thrilled when he allowed me to volunteer on farm calls. The first animal I saw euthanized was his long-time equine patient. Dr. Smith brought comfort, faith in the unknown and shared in the owner's grief. Every time I euthanize a patient I hope to reflect the compassionate example he set.

Dr. Jamie Noland of Cal Poly SLO was every pre-veterinary student's mentor. Still, she made each student feel special and provided hugs when needed! Along with teaching numerous technical skills she mirrored a human side to mentorship and provided emotional support through the rigorous challenges of undergraduate school. Now I try to notice when a staff member is having a hard day, to give words of encouragement or a warm touch like Dr. Noland.

Surgery and anesthesia are sources of anxiety for new grads. I too have concern about them, but am more comfortable with these procedures because I previously worked as a surgery technician for Drs. Josh Jackson and Fred Pike of Veterinary Specialty Hospital. Experience in technical skills proved invaluable. During fourth year externships I returned and Drs. Laura Stokking, Steve Hill and John Hart shared their expertise to prepare me for small animal clinical practice.

Mentors have prepared me for the unknown. Last month I was brought a frog that had severely fractured a leg. After radiographs and some research from VIN on frog anesthesia I amputated. I felt comfortable trying a



procedure I had never done on a species I have never treated. Why? Because of multiple doctors who spent time teaching me about exotic species during fourth year rotations at Sea World and San Diego Zoo.

The most important mentorship situation is a new grad's first job. I was blessed to have Dr. Steve Kubelun of Banfield Encinitas as my coach — he was forever kind and patient walking me through new procedures and difficult cases. Dr. Steve combined humor and teaching with an open mind. When I told him I had been given an ideal and unique job opportunity in L.A he offered congratulations and support. I will forever be thankful for his gentle guidance.

This article could go on for pages. Western U faculty, CVMA board members, and numerous others have impacted my career. May this tribute be insightful of eternal appreciation to all those who teach...mentorship matters!