

Name:

Ella

Job title:

Veterinary surgeon

Career:

I qualified as a veterinary surgeon at the Royal Veterinary College, London, in 2010, and have worked in the Surrey practice since October 2011. To gain entry to Veterinary Medicine, I needed to get good qualifications at school, including GCSEs (age 16) with good grades in maths, English, sciences, a language and humanities subjects. I went on to do AS levels in Chemistry, Biology, Geography and Performing Arts, then finally A2s in Chemistry, Biology and Geography.



I work in a large veterinary practice in Surrey. I specialise in critical care in the Surbiton practice where there is a small hospital wing. There are four more branches across South West London. Working in the company are 12 veterinary surgeons, 3 qualified veterinary nurses, 6 unqualified nurses, 7 receptionists, one HR person, one accounts/finance person and 2 events personnel.

Responsibilities:

- Doing checks, call the owners of the inpatients, and make plans for them.
- Carrying out any procedures that inpatients might need, for example placing a feeding tube or doing an operation.
- I do the client updates
- Teach the nurses and other vets about any procedures that need to be carried out in the evening.
- On call for any emergencies that come in during the night.
- I often find I carry out other roles in the practice as needed, for example extra consults in the practice, doing others' procedures, anaesthetising animals for surgery carried out by the principal vet by inserting an iv injection.

Essential skills in my job:

- Practical skills,
- Teamwork,
- Leadership,
- Communication,
- Decision-making,
- Planning

What I need to know in my job:

- Scientific and technical knowledge of a veterinary surgeon
- Accounts protocol
- Rules and regulations of what staff should and should not be doing
- Health and safety, including locking up, how to write up the use of dangerous drugs, storing drugs, how to preserve client confidentiality, how to store information



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Veterinary surgeon, Ella

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In order to be interviewed for a university place, I needed A as predicted A2 grades, which my school gave me. I was accepted on the course with A2 results of one A and two Bs. From the age of 14 I gained extensive work experience with animals in a range of settings, I built up a portfolio which was impressive, and this helped me to gain entry into vet school.

School skills that I can exploit in my work include: biology knowledge, team working skills, working with range of different people, a science club, teaching - which is an important part of the job as they have many inexperienced staff. Performing arts helped with communication as I can put on my 'vet voice', which is not really me.

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I am the main hospital vet for critical care, specialising in the practice out of hours service. A typical day at work begins at 10.30 am, at which point inpatients will have been medicated and checked by the nurses. I then do my own checks, call the owners of the inpatients, and make plans for them. I will then carry out any procedures that they might need, for example placing a feeding tube or doing an operation. I am supposed to finish this shift at 2.00 and return at 7.00 for further checks, but my shifts often over-run. At 7.00 I do the client updates, and teach the nurses and other vets about any procedures that need to be carried out in the evening. I then leave at 11.00 and am on call for any emergencies that come in during the night. I work one week on and one week off. I often find I carry out other roles in the practice as needed, for example extra consults in the practice, doing others' procedures, anaesthetising animals for surgery carried out by the principal vet by inserting an iv injection.

I work with many others in the practice who have a range of roles and experience, including other vets, new graduates, certificate holders, a specialist visiting professor, plus animals and their clients. In my practice most clients are comfortably off financially, a reflection of the location in Surrey, however some clients are less well off. The nurses and receptionists come from different backgrounds, some from working class some from well-off middle class.

I do a certain amount of travelling in my work, sometimes to different branches of the practice, sometimes taking patients for scanning at a specialist location, sometimes to different practices to obtain emergency medications or equipment, sometimes I have to do home visits. I also travel in my own time for Professional Development to Gloucester and Scotland (I am doing a certificate in emergency critical care) and to other practices to 'see practice' carried out by other surgeons.

The most interesting thing in my work are interesting cases. For example, we had a dog that was vomiting continuously. Working as a team of two we ruled out many things then did a scan to see if any foreign bodies were stuck, whether it was an inflammatory process, or whether the dog had eaten something terrible. We never found out exactly what caused the vomiting, but as he was getting better we stopped doing further tests such as scoping. Another interesting case was a foreign body eaten by a dog- it was peanut polystyrene which swelled up in his stomach. It was interesting surgery.

I find the most challenging aspect of my job is 'working with the boss' (he is very autocratic and has limited interpersonal skills). Other than that I can be faced with lots of clinical decisions where you might have to compromise one thing to help another body system, you are in a situation

where you can't really win, but you have to just give it a go and see what happens. Another challenge is when the owners are being very difficult.

I became a vet by deciding that was what I wanted to do, working very hard, and being extremely determined to get there.

In terms of tips and advice I would give 13-15 year olds, I think that experience with animals was essential so they know what they are letting themselves in for. Get work experience at a vet practice, but this might only be possible at 16. Other than that as much experience as possible with animals, as they can be very unpredictable, work in a kennels, stables, on a farm, even visit an abattoir, you need to be able to handle watching a pig getting slaughtered – to make sure that you have the stomach to be a vet (eg when a cat gets ripped in half by a dog).