

First Year Veterinarian

By Amber Andersen, DVM

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



With mixed emotions I write this last article as a first year veterinarian. Reflections include the many lessons learned and how much life can change in a year. Congratulatory calls and emails have supported this article and my new professional endeavors. These conversations remind me that I am living my dream and am thankful for every day.

Lesson 1 – The human-animal bond expands beyond the formal studies of veterinary school.

Animals act as our dedicated companions and also provide for our overall well-being. Creatures carry us on their backs, guide us when we are blind, and provide us food and clothing. This bond is sacred and I feel humbled to provide support to animals through veterinary medicine.

My favorite patient, Bonnie, a Golden Retriever, and Ms. Jones exemplified this relationship. Bonnie had been trained as a service dog by Ms. Jones and was then given to a disabled man to assist him. Years later the man passed away and Bonnie was returned to Ms. Jones as she was now weak from a neuropathy. The investment we make in animals seems to always return in some form.

Lesson 2 – Veterinarians have extensive transferable knowledge.

Legally we can treat all species but one. Still, through the “One Health” movement veterinarians are now recognized as having a large impact on human health. This diversity of training and experience helped me obtain my current role and contributes to my work at the Annenberg Foundation. Training at Western U also fostered adaptability to changing circumstances and situations. Broad knowledge allows consultation in building our public education center, completion of class work for a Masters in Public Health, and writing for an online magazine — all in one day! In addition, I will continue to pursue public education about the human-animal bond through media work and blog posts at www.petdramber.com. All veterinarians choose a career which allows for such variety in work and for us to stretch beyond our comfort level.

Lesson 3 – Reach for the stars and live what is in your heart.

This is a lesson exemplified repeatedly in my life this year. As a first year graduate I have taken a large leap in my career by starting at the ground floor of an amazing project. Now, when pursuing all my goals I make no excuses, create no boundaries

and keep steadfast faith. I hope all of us in our first year feel this enthusiasm for work — and can invigorate those still in school, or veterinarians working on their third decade as dedicated practitioners.

Finally, I offer a sincere thank you to the CVMA for allowing me to share experiences with your readers. In working with the CVMA, I have realized the importance of unity in our small profession, along with membership in the organization. Additionally, Western U staff has continued providing assistance and I often reach out to our experts for help. On behalf of other new graduates, I express great appreciation to all of you who supported the class of 2009 in our first year as Doctors of Veterinary Medicine.