

*** The following blog is my opinion and does not necessarily reflect the policies or procedures of Mountain View Veterinary Clinic. I will however attempt to provide readers with accurate information based on articles, etc. from reputable sources such as the American Veterinary Medical Association.*

May 20, 2014

To Be or Not To Be...That Is The Question

By Kimberly Dumore

I have been in the veterinary industry in one capacity or another for over 22 years and I've worn a *lot* of hats. I've worked in small animal practices (dogs, cats, pocket pets, reptiles), a large animal practice (which renewed my interest in working with horses), and emergency/specialty practices. One of the things I get asked quite often is why, after all of these years, I am NOT a veterinarian or a registered human nurse. Besides, they say, the pay for either one of those is quite a bit better than what a veterinary assistant or technician makes. I've spent a lot of years asking myself that same question and have yet to come up with an answer.

After high school, I was well on my way to getting into nursing school or teaching and was working on all of my prerequisites when I applied for a job as a receptionist at a local small animal veterinary clinic. At that time I didn't have the required experience but they hired me as a "kennel assistant" anyway. Being a kennel assistant was *far* from glamorous...walking dogs (or attempting to walk the ones that are trying to take *you* on a walk), cleaning kennels, cleaning up "accidents" of every icky kind....you get the picture. At first, every time I was taught something new, I was *terrified*. I didn't want to make a mistake. After all, I was helping with a living, breathing animal.

As time went on I was able to learn more and more and went on to being a receptionist then office manager but I have finally gravitated back to more "hands-on" care. Unlike human nursing I have the ability and opportunity to do a

huge variety of things that in today's human medicine are "farmed out" to someone specialized in that area. I get to be a surgical assistant, phlebotomist, an exam room assistant, laboratory technician, nutrition counselor, receptionist, billing specialist, behavior counselor, housekeeping, IT specialist, office manager, radiology technician, supply clerk, grief counselor, and many other things I'm sure I've forgotten to list. Now, I am not a certified or licensed veterinary technician but I have a tremendous amount of respect for those who have completed a certification program. Those programs are anywhere from 2 to 4 years depending on what state you live in and what school you attend. The veterinarians I've worked with went to school for a minimum of 8 years (or more if they went into some sort of specialty). I have been fortunate enough over the years to work with doctors and technicians who were willing to teach me new things and I have often sought out their expertise in order to be able to provide better care to my clients and their pets. Client education has always been my priority and I strive to make sure my clients understand why we are recommend things like yearly wellness exams, vaccines, diagnostic procedures or surgeries, flea control, heartworm testing and prevention, etc.

Although I have a huge amount of respect for human nurses as well, for me, it will always be veterinary medicine. I enjoy having the ability to work with more than one species even if some of those species aren't quite so willing to let us work with them. Some of my friends who are in the veterinary field say they went into it because they didn't want to deal with people as much. In my experience though, an amazing assistant or technician is good at not only the medical aspect of it all but they're a good "people person" too. When a patient comes through the door, it's the patient who often needs some sort of assistance but it is the owner you have to educate or counsel in order to provide the best outcome for their pet. Just because you start out as a human nurse, doesn't mean you can't decide to go back to school and become a veterinary assistant or technician or visa-versa. So, back to the original question....become a human nurse or go into veterinary medicine? Overall, what it all boils down to what is your heart telling you.