

Science@CornellVet

A science blog straight from the students and trainees of Cornell Vet

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From Lecture Notes to White Coats – The Transition to the Clinic Floor

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Mike Merkhassine '18 and Alex Halasz '18 examine a slide for signs of bacterial infection.

If good things come to those who wait, what comes to those who wait for over 20 years? That's right, a bright white coat. Veterinary students, obtaining a white coat that signifies that they're ready for hands-on training in the animal hospital is the culmination of a lifetime's worth of hard work, sleepless nights, and questions from family asking, "You stuck your arm where in the cow?"

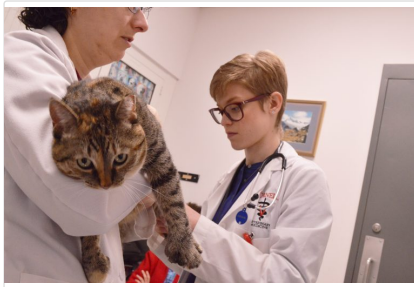
On March 27, 2017, the transition from the classroom to the hospital floor began for the current third-year Cornell veterinary students. It's a rite of passage for every Cornell vet student in which they take all they have learned from the thousands of hours of studying and finally apply it with a purpose to living, breathing, patients. Whether it's performing a routine puppy check-up or assisting with a life-saving surgery, the experiences of students on clinical rotations will prepare them for facing the case

they encounter upon graduation.

Here at the Cornell College of Veterinary Medicine, students spend their first two and a half years of the four-year program learning about everything from anatomy to physiology to clinical medicine. During this time, a large portion of the curriculum is based on lectures and digging deep into textbooks trying to understand what all those foreign words were that your professor mentioned in lecture. During the student's third year, the classroom portion of the program comes to an end, students receive their white coats, and transition to what is called "clinical rotations," or what some call "the first step to becoming a doctor."

During their clinical rotations, students spend two weeks at a time rotating through different services at the Cornell University Animal Hospital and serve as student clinicians, gaining the experience they need to become a veterinarian. Students rotate through services such as anesthesia, orthopedic surgery, dentistry, clinical neurology, emergency and critical care, and ambulatory medicine. The student clinicians take their own cases, develop plans for the patients, perform diagnostic tests, assist with needed surgeries, and do everything else in between.

Students not only hone their skills on clinics, but they are also given the opportunity to explore and find their interests within the field. For current fourth-year student Lindsay Daly, who recently finished her clinical year, the experiences in clinics exposed her to newfound interests. Although she started veterinary school with the goal of pursuing a career in swine production medicine, her experiences in clinics broadened her interests. Daly was recently accepted to a one-year rotating internship that will help her pursue her new goal: becoming a small animal emergency doctor.



Student Alex Halasz '18 examines her patient Suzanne.

Daly reflects upon her experience in clinics as, “Invaluable. Your clinical year provides a platform for hands-learning and exploration and you are encouraged and supported by clinicians and faculty every step of the way.”

Not only do clinics allow students to better themselves, but they also provide the opportunity to have a direct impact on bettering the lives of animals and the community. Third-year student Steve Moirano discussed how on one of his rotations he spent two weeks performing surgical procedures, such as spays and neuters, for animals from local shelters. Although he said that performing surgeries can be a bit nerve-racking “You become really motivated to do a good job so that you can provide the best treatment for these animals. For some of these animals, this may be the only opportunity they have to undergo such procedures. It is the motivation to help these animals that drives you to prepare and perform to the best of your ability.”

Serving in the clinics also builds personal connections, and students come away with heart-warming stories that affirm all the reasons they wanted to enter the veterinary profession. For Daly, one patient in particular stands out.

“I worked with a dog who had undergone a back surgery as he had been suffering from chronic, excruciating pain and inability to even control his own bladder,” she says. It was a hard thing to see, but treatment soon turned things around for the pup.



Student Helen Tsoi '18 obtains a heart rate on her patient, Emma.

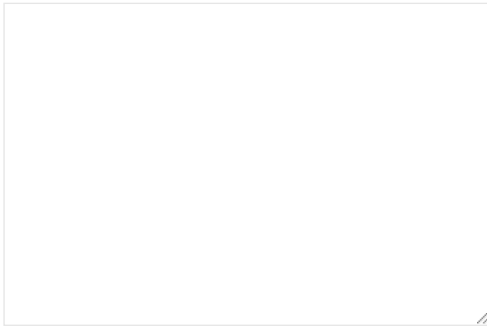
“By the end of his hospital stay, he was full of personality and had regained control of his bladder. I was able to join the neurology service a few months later for his recheck appointment. He had regained considerable function of his limbs again. Each little step of the way felt like a huge victory for this dog and I was fortunate to be a part of his inspiring recovery,” says Daly.

–By Nicholas Walsh, second-year veterinary student

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