

Harpeth Valley Animal Hospital is a two-doctor small animal practice located in Nashville, TN. The clinic provides veterinary services for dogs and cats, as well as offers grooming and boarding. In addition to the two doctors, there are technicians, receptionists, and kennel staff – all of whom are crucial for the practice to run smoothly. Harpeth Valley is a teaching hospital, which means that I was not the only one who was there to learn; there were also frequently vet tech students who spent the day with us.

When I first began my internship, I spent several days working in the kennel. This served two purposes – first, it was a great introduction into the basic animal care practices that are essential at any animal hospital (cage-cleaning, walking, feeding); secondly, these few days allowed me to begin to understand how each person's role in the hospital contributed to a successful operation. After the first few days, I spent most of my time in the hospital area instead of the kennel, but those few days of kennel work gave me an important understanding of how the clinic operated.

Over the course of the summer, I learned many new skills that every vet and technician need to know. I learned to prepare and administer vaccines, run a variety of lab tests, draw blood, prep for surgery, prepare an IV line and bag, calculate doses for different drugs, and perform many other tasks. I also got to observe many surgeries and participate in a few procedures, such as dental cleaning and spay/neuter. The opportunity to scrub into surgery and assist with a spay or neuter was absolutely one of the highlights of the summer.

One of my most important jobs was handling patient rooms. When a patient would arrive, I would bring the owner and animal into a room. Then, I would discuss what was going on with the animal and gather as much information as possible about the

problem. I would then answer any questions to the best of my ability. For annual exams, I would explain to the owner what vaccines the animal would be getting during the visit. After talking to the owner, I would bring the animal to the back and get its weight and any needed samples before calling the doctor. Once the doctor arrived, I would restrain the animal during the exam/treatment.

While practicing all the medical skills described above taught me about animal care, the experience of working a patient room taught me about owner interactions. Knowing how to work with the owners in a pleasant, productive way is an important skill for any veterinarian. Often, the owners are stressed because of their animal's health problems, and comforting them, while still collecting the needed information, is essential.

I also learned about a variety of diseases and how to manage them. Both of the doctors did an excellent job of explaining the diagnosis, process, and management of each disease that we encountered. I was also able to follow several cases through the summer, which allowed me to see first-hand how the disease progressed. For me, the cases that I got to follow long term were high points because they showed me a very realistic picture of applied veterinary medicine. For example, one of the first cases I saw during the early days of my internship was Boogie, a diabetic cat. Boogie was a newly diagnosed diabetic who had been receiving insulin treatments for only a short time. On this particular day, Boogie was coming in for a checkup following a trip to the emergency room for a hypoglycemic crisis the night before. At this visit, Boogie's blood glucose level was tested and his insulin dose adjusted. Throughout the summer, Boogie came in several times for blood glucose curves, which allowed the vet to monitor his progress and adjust the insulin dose accordingly. By the time I left, Boogie's diabetes had progressed

to the point that the vet was considering taking him off insulin because dietary management seemed to be effective alone. Being able to closely follow a patient over an extended time period, seeing their ups and downs and how the vets responded, was very interesting and helped me see the complete picture of what it means to be a veterinarian.

Overall, the most important thing I gained from this internship was an understanding of how a real veterinary practice functions from top to bottom, day to day. This is something that could never be fully understood from reading a book or taking a class – it must be experienced first hand. This experience helped make my aspirations to become a vet even stronger; being in an animal hospital every day confirmed that this work interests and excites me. One unexpected way that it influenced my goals was opening my eyes to the possibility of being a veterinary specialist. The most complicated cases I saw were referred to specialists – oncologists, surgeons, dermatologists, radiologists, and so on. Becoming a veterinary specialist is not something that I previously considered, but it is absolutely something that I will look into in the future. This internship increased my determination to become a vet and opened my eyes to the full extent of the opportunities I could have with that career choice. It was an invaluable experience.