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Vanessa is a 2nd year student, studying a Veterinary Nursing Diploma at Abbeydale Vet Nurse Training. She is hoping to do some work in wildlife rehabilitation and zoology in the future. In practice, she enjoys consulting and being on the ward. In her spare time, she likes spending time with friends and family as well as hiking, cooking and training her dog, Benji..
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Training to be a veterinary nurse during a global pandemic

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ABSTRACT: Veterinary Nurse training during a pandemic can be done – it just takes a lot of self discipline and commitment. There have been push backs but the past year has also been a valuable lesson. There are so many things that I have learnt in the past year and so many skills that will be useful in my future career. For example, being ‘thrown’ in at the deep end meant that I just had to get on with things – I took my first blood sample and performed a scale and polish in the first few months of lockdown.

Keywords: student; training; pandemic

Being a Veterinary Nurse student whilst working full time is hard enough, let alone doing it during the middle of a pandemic! There have been plenty of times when it has been really hard – particularly when it comes to practical learning and preparing for assessments, which we have missed out on completely due to the colleges being closed. Although the valuable experience that I have gained from being in practice has been invaluable.

I have now finished college with just my final written exam, professional discussion and OSCEs left to do. I was able to physically attend college for the last few weeks but other than that I have done over half my studies from home during the pandemic. Something I learned quickly when lockdown first hit in March 2020 was that I needed to be very self-motivated to be able to progress with my course.

During the beginning of the pandemic, I was required to work more hours in practice for a few weeks. This meant I worked on the day I should have attended college classes, putting extra pressure on me to catch up with my college work after my full working days. At first, this was quite intense but I adapted to it quickly – I think we all had to adapt quickly when the pandemic first arrived! To start with online lessons were pre-recorded so any questions we had had to be sent via email after the lesson, which was pretty difficult for both students and teachers. Then later on we advanced to live online lessons where we were able to participate almost as if we were in the classroom. This

made it much easier for us all and I think we certainly benefitted from it.

After things settled down, I was able to return to having one day off per week for college. This allowed me to get ahead with my Skills Log and other assignments as well (since there was nothing else to do!), putting me in a really good position.

I was due to sit my second written exam in April 2020 but that was pushed back until July. This had quite a negative impact on me and left me feeling unmotivated to revise for an exam that, by this point, I assumed would be delayed again. Luckily, I found my motivation to revise because the exam ended up taking place. Then we had the good news that from September we were allowed to go back into college. But this was very short-lived and after just a few weeks, another lockdown was imposed. Luckily in January, my third written exam was allowed to go ahead under Covid restrictions.

Doing the exams in lockdown conditions was very strange as we weren’t allowed to congregate before or after the exams and not being able to be in college a few weeks before for last-minute revision caused a lot of panic.

It was really difficult to cope with not physically going into college. Not only because of the obvious educational impact it had on us, but also the negative social impact. Going into college was a nice ‘break’ from the practical side of our jobs and it was always nice to catch up with other students and discuss ideas with them. When we were eventually

allowed back into the classroom in March 2021, it was immediately clear that we had all missed being around each other.

Being away from college was definitely difficult, but I managed to find a good balance and with added self-discipline, I managed to motivate myself to keep learning. I think a lot of my motivation came from me thinking about what I wanted to do in the future – but to be able to do those things, I needed to stay motivated and pass my exams. I also gained a lot of motivation from my Veterinary Nursing Instagram account. The teachers also had the huge task of planning and delivering our lessons online – a difficult thing to do when what you are learning is such a practical job! However, our teachers were incredible and never once complained about the situation. They just continued to help us in the best way they could. Ultimately, none of us has ever experienced something like this and it was a case of finding what worked best for us all.

However, lockdown wasn't all bad! Running the practice on skeleton staff meant that I got thrown in at the deep end and had to take on tasks I had never done before. The past year has helped me grow so much and allowed me to gain huge confidence in myself and my abilities to do my job.

I also set up my own Vet Nursing Instagram account (@tails_svn) where I have connected with so many other SVN's and RVN's around the world. I originally set up this account almost as something to do during the lockdowns. But after just a few weeks of having the account I started to gain the motivation I needed to complete my Veterinary Nursing training. This also gave me the chance to learn about things that we don't see in practice as well as talk about the things that I am passionate about. Having my Instagram account also kept me motivated with all my college work as I was able to communicate with other SVN's that were in a similar position to myself.

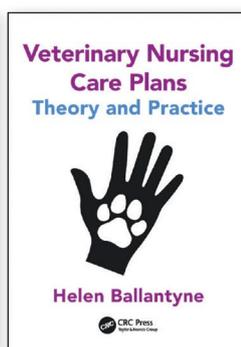
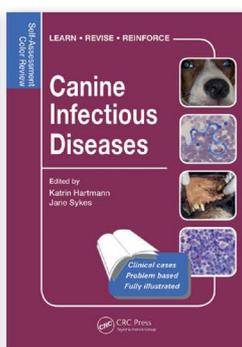
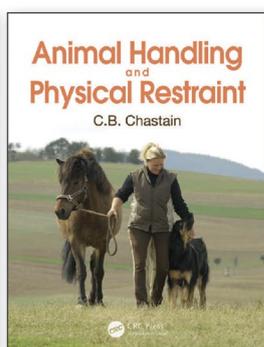
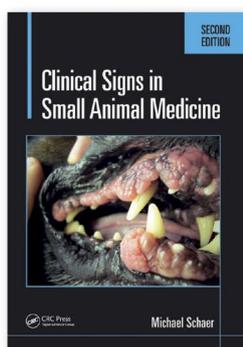
Throughout this past year, and the whole of my Veterinary Nurse training, I have gathered together some tips for other SVN's:

- ALWAYS keep on top of your work!
- Keep a notebook on you to write down any log cases.
- Try to log something on your skills log every week – it will soon come together that way. This will also save a lot of time as it is easy to forget a case and then have to look the details up.
- Start revising for exams early.
- Always ask for help when you need it – it's ok to ask!
- Remember to take time to relax and do things you enjoy too – you will find you are more productive this way.

It has been a difficult year for us all, but we all need to see the positive things that have come from these strange times and see that there is light at the end of the tunnel. It is certainly a year that I will remember for the good as well as the bad.

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