

#MonthlyMotivation: Kim Marsh (class of 2013)



Growing up around animals, Kim always knew she wanted to be a Veterinary Surgeon ...

What inspired you to become a veterinary surgeon?

I can't remember considering another career path. I grew up around animals, and as a child, spent a lot of my free time on a stable yard or farm. I knew I would never be suited for an office job, as I like to be on my feet all day. I wanted a practical job that required problem-solving and would require continual learning. I enjoy working as part of a team and wanted to make a difference to people and their animals, so becoming a vet seemed the obvious choice. As soon as I started vet school I knew I'd made the right choice.

What does a standard day in a small animal practice look like?

I usually start the day by consulting, speaking to owners who've brought in their animals with a variety of problems. Appointments vary hugely, from first vaccinations with healthy puppies to critically ill patients needing hospitalization. At our practice we are assigned to consulting or operating shifts. If operating, I'll start my surgical procedures (anything from routine neutering, to lump removals or abdominal surgery) by 8.30am and be done by mid-afternoon to resume consulting. My day usually ends writing clinical notes and ringing owners with test results.

What have been your highlights since leaving Putney?

Vet school was a huge highlight. The high number of contact hours and small teaching groups for practical skills, meant our year group became very close across the five years. Glasgow has such a community feel. Everyone always looked out for each other and the social calendar was packed. Vet schools across the UK integrate a lot too, with student conferences and the annual [AVS Sports Weekend](#) (when all of the UK vet schools descend on one city to compete in a variety of sports and party together). Another major highlight was playing in the [World Ultimate Club Championships](#) in Cincinnati with Glasgow Ultimate during my final year. I picked the sport in my first few weeks at Glasgow, and have been playing ever since. The sport has also taken me all over Europe, and I've made some of my closest friendships through the teams I've played for.

What have been the most challenging aspects of being a veterinary surgeon?

Being a vet surgeon can be tough. The hours are long (my standard shift is 11 hours) and shift patterns and on call work can be quite antisocial. If an emergency comes in last thing you stay and help out, which often means missing out on seeing friends or playing sport.

Our salaries are lower than those of other five year vocational degrees, and only improve if you own your own practice or spend at least a further four years studying to become a specialist. It's definitely not the right profession if you want to earn a lot! Bad days can be truly awful. Pet owners can be angry or difficult to manage, and you're out of your comfort zone on a daily basis dealing with diseases or situations you've never come across before. Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you lose patients.

Despite only being 18 months graduated, I've had many friends reconsider their career path or take breaks from work due to stress or mental health problems. Sadly this is a reoccurring theme across the profession, but awareness of these issues and the support available is improving. In spite of the rather negative picture I've painted, I can't stress how rewarding and fulfilling this job can be. A hug or a thank you from a grateful owner when you hand back a healthy animal can make all the stress of the week worth it. I've had exceptionally challenging days at work, but if I could choose again, I'd still choose to be a vet!

What advice would you give to those looking to follow a career in veterinary medicine and surgery?

Be sure you want this career – if nothing I've mentioned so far has put you off, then go for it! Seeing as much of a practice as you can before vet school will give you a realistic idea of a normal day and the variety the job can offer. People skills are really important, and vet schools look for students who can communicate well. Make sure you're happy talking to everyone about anything. Having something else aside from veterinary is so important whether that is sport, a creative hobby or a pet!

How did Putney prepare you for your career as a vet?

The Biology Department at Putney were fantastic. They arranged additional classes for all the medical students and encouraged us to read continually. All of the teachers pushed me to develop myself outside of academia, to strive to be the best version of myself in whatever I chose to do. This gave me confidence to say yes to the opportunities offered to me, even if they were outside of my comfort zone. All of these skills have served me well throughout university and the first few years as a vet.