

## Mental Wellbeing

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Devoted. Loyal. Selfless. These are three words that characterize a veterinary nurse. Most of us work over 40 hours per week on minimal rest, dedicate our days and nights to our careers, and pour our hearts and souls into caring for our patients daily. I feel I can speak for most of us when I say we care about our patient's physical and mental wellbeing more than we do ourselves. Most of us feel guilty when we leave work early or even leave on time. This, my fellow veterinary nurses, needs to change. With this being said, I want to share my own personal story with you.

As a Veterinary Behavior Nurse, I always put the mental wellbeing of my patient's life before my own. I work to be an advocate and to be their voice at home and in stressful environments. I also coach their owners to be able to work on prescribed behavioral therapy plans to increase the quality of their lives. These are only a few of the many rewarding and joyous parts of working at a behavior-only practice. I love that I have the opportunity to become very close with the two-legged pet parents who walk in with our patients. Sometimes, I talk to these people more than I do my own family. My patients, their pet parents, and I gain more closeness than the typical nurse/patient/client relationship.

As with every story there are some negatives. I would come home from work feeling exhausted, short of breath, and unable to relax as I wanted to be on call for every patient all day, every day, 24/7. I wanted to save the life of each mentally challenged pet and felt that stopping for even one second would cause a backslide in a patient. Becoming close with your patients and clients has its negatives as well. I feel that sometimes discussing and recommending euthanasia under my veterinarian's authorization is even harder than it was when I worked in a general practice. I'm not only emotionally attached to the patient but also the pet parents.

About 1.5 years ago, I was able to admit to myself that I was suffering from burnout, depression, and anxiety. It has been a long journey of counseling, meditation, mindfulness, and finding yoga, but I feel that I am more mentally clear than I ever have been. I feel that this has not only been a positive for myself, but for my patients as I am able to have a clear mind and focus during work hours.

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological, and social well being. If we are mentally well we are able to see our full potential, cope with stresses in our lives, and become more productive in our work environment. We need to remember that it is not inappropriate to put our mental wellbeing first. If we are unable to have a clear focus and mind, we can make negative life altering changes to our patients and to ourselves.

My hope in sharing my story is that I can help a fellow colleague with the same issues. Please know you are not alone and that there are other nurses who may feel the same way you do. No one is here to judge. We want to give you resources for help and to let you know that YOU are important too.