



Name: Veronica Brandel
Qualifications: BSc (Hons) RVN REVN
Year of Qualification: 2007

Veronica was born in Stockholm, Sweden but at the age of two her family moved to Italy, where she grew up. She moved to the UK to study at the University of the West of England and graduated in 2004 with a BSc in Veterinary Nursing. She subsequently worked mainly in small animal practice and was awarded VN (Veterinary Nurse) status by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons in 2007. She spent a year working in an equine practice in South Wales before joining RosSDales in 2010. In 2013 she completed a 'top-up' nursing qualification and was awarded Registered Equine Veterinary Nurse (REVN) status. Veronica additionally lectures for The Open College of Equine Studies and has been asked to speak at one of the BEVA regional meetings. She is thoroughly enjoying her work at RosSDales and is pleased that the nurses are such valued members of the veterinary team.

EQUINE VETERINARY NURSING

By Helen Gale

As horse owners, we are all familiar with dealing with vets, either when they visit our horses, or perhaps when a referral to an equine hospital is required. But what do we know about equine veterinary nursing?

The nurses at RosSDales Equine Hospital (REH) are key members of the veterinary team, supporting the vets and carrying out a wide and varied range of important duties 'behind the scenes'. So what exactly do they do?

The role of an equine veterinary nurse

RosSDales has a team of eight skilled and experienced Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs). RVNs are registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and achieving RVN status indicates that the person is qualified and committed to keeping their skills and knowledge up-to-date. RVNs also follow the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses and, if things go wrong, undergo a disciplinary process, similar to that for veterinary surgeons.

RosSDales' veterinary nurses work alongside the vets and at the direction of a vet. Their role is varied and challenging: duties include critical care nursing, wound management and bandaging, administering complex medical therapies and drugs and supervising the operating theatres and post-operative recovery procedures. Qualified nurses are able to advise clients on post-operative care and will also demonstrate and advise on drug regimes, as well as general daily husbandry - e.g. hand grazing, walking exercise, stable care, achieving a dust free environment, managing discharging wounds or administering oral drugs.

Two of the nurses additionally spend time as clinical coaches, training nursing students, and all of the nurses here help in the instruction and guidance of visiting veterinary students during their time 'seeing practice' at the hospital. Most of the students find

that advice on husbandry and wound and catheter care is particularly useful. Additionally, all of the nurses here have been involved in lecturing for the British Equine Veterinary Association (BEVA), the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) and The Open College of Equine Studies (TOCES). Vicky Gregory has run courses for BEVA and some of the nurses have been invited to speak at BEVA's annual conferences.

A day in the life

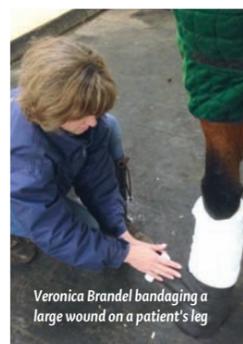
Vicky says that every day at work is different, as the nurses don't know what cases they will be seeing - some horses will be admitted for scheduled surgery or other veterinary procedures, whereas others will come in as emergency cases. As I write this article, a call to the hospital reveals that the nurses are particularly busy today, as two



Natalie Fisk in theatre, bandaging a front leg following arthroscopy



Elaine Packer attends to a horse receiving fluid therapy in the Intensive Care Unit



Veronica Brandel bandaging a large wound on a patient's leg



Lynn Irving monitoring a horse in the padded recovery room following surgery and before extubation (removal of breathing tube).

colic cases have been admitted this morning. All the nurses work shifts and nursing administrator Rebecca Hilton is responsible for organising the nurses' working hours. Rebecca schedules the complex rota six months in advance to ensure that there is appropriate nursing cover in the various departments of the hospital at all times, day and night, 365 days a year. Each nurse will be on-call one night a week. They are additionally required to work one in every four weekends on-call, plus one or two bank holidays each year. From January until the end of June, two additional nurses are employed to provide extra out of hours cover during the busy foaling season at the specialist neonatal and older foal intensive care unit. Patients here, as in the adult intensive care unit, require around the clock monitoring and care.

The early shift starts at 6am and is known as the 'Intensive Care Unit 1' or ICU1 shift. The nurses are busy from the moment they arrive and start the day by checking all the hospital in-patients. They are responsible for all nursing care, procedures and treatments for critically ill patients in the ICU, plus the preparation of the first horse for surgery - usually all before 8am. Daily 'rounds' then take place (a group discussion between the vets and nurses about every horse that is being

treated at the hospital, with details for each case written up on a large white board) before the nurses continue with morning procedures and treatments for ICU patients. They will also assist with any emergency cases that are admitted to the hospital during the day. Nurses working in theatre and post-operative recovery will arrive a little later (shifts start at 8am or 9.30am) and they will also attend to other pre-operative patients during the day.

Veronica Brandel qualified as an RVN in 2007 and has worked at RosSDales since 2010. She said: "In some practices, nurses spend their careers holding horses and watching as the vets do everything including bandaging and wound management. At RosSDales we work closely with the vets and our skills are recognised and properly utilised. We get to do what we're trained to do and this in turn allows the vets to carry out their jobs more effectively", she explained. Veronica continued: "For example, if a horse is going into surgery, we will undertake much of the preparation. The surgeon will come into theatre when the horse has been prepared, is under general anaesthetic and has been positioned on the operating table, or is under sedation and local anaesthetic in the standing surgery suite. As nurses, we carry



Vicky Gregory monitoring the blood pressure of a foal in the neonatal foal intensive care unit.

out all of the post-operative care following surgery, including overseeing the patient's recovery from general anaesthetic, which requires careful monitoring and management as the horse comes around. Part of our post-op duties include catheter care and horses recovering from colic surgery will receive fluids via a drip before progressing to solid food. We will also discuss progress and aftercare with the horse's owners, in conjunction with the clinician." Veronica went on to explain how procedures work when it is necessary to isolate a horse for medical reasons. "If, for example, a horse or a foal is admitted with diarrhoea, we must determine whether they are contagious, so they are admitted to our isolation facility a short distance away at the practice in Newmarket. A dedicated nurse will be assigned to caring for the patient to ensure

that no other horses are infected. The boxes there have CCTV links to the hospital and to the practice offices on site, so that patients can be monitored by clinicians and nurses 24 hours a day." In these cases, faecal samples will be taken for analysis by the laboratory technicians, who will be looking for organisms such as Salmonella, rotavirus and Clostridium, which are common causes of diarrhoea in foals and adult horses and can be fatal. Meanwhile, the patient will receive intensive nursing. This will include fluid therapy via a drip or nasogastric tube and will often include treatment with antibiotics and Bio-Sponge, a product that helps to restore normal gastrointestinal function. The nurse will ensure that catheter sites are kept as sterile as possible to prevent infection and the patient will be kept clean, with its tail wrapped to prevent diarrhoea scalding. As treatment progresses,

droppings will be monitored to ensure that they are returning to normal and not becoming too firm, which may cause further problems if a blockage occurs. Often these horses will be depressed and dull, so the nurse will offer small samples of different types of food to encourage them to regain their appetite - this may include offering small quantities of grass, hay, haylage, a mash, different

types of hard feed and carrots. During the whole isolation procedure, strict biosecurity measures will be in place, including the use of disposable gloves and clean overalls, and footwear will be disinfected on entering and leaving the isolation area. All supplies for use with isolation cases are kept separate and nothing is taken out for use elsewhere. At all times during the working day, communication with other members of the team and attention to detail is of paramount importance. Veronica said: "We know how important these horses and ponies are to their owners. Our job is to ensure that they are treated with the greatest of care and in a professional manner at all times."

Veterinary nursing as a career

The RCVS and BVNA websites provide information about a career in veterinary nursing and the different pathways that can be taken to achieve nursing qualifications. Two organisations, Central Qualifications and The City of Guilds London Institute, currently offer vocational qualifications that are approved by the RCVS as a 'licence to practise' in veterinary nursing, and which entitle holders to enter the

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Lisa Taylor prepares surgical instruments for the operating theatre



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