

Episode 29 | 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT



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FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 1

Four reasons why our jobs in Vet Med are so hard, what you can do about it, and an update on Willow the Cat, that's what I'm talking about in Episode 29.

Welcome to the Joyful DVM Podcast. I'm your host, Veterinarian, and Certified Life Coach, Cari Wise. Whether you're dealing with the challenges in Vet Med, struggling with self-confidence, or you're just trying to figure out how to create a life and a career that you actually enjoy, you'll find encouragement, education, and empowering concepts, you can apply right away. Let's get started.

Hey, everybody. Welcome to Episode 29. Today, we're going to talk about four components of Vet Med misery, but before we get there, I want to give you a quick update on the cat. I know some of you guys caught Episode 28, where I shared a little bit about what had been going on here behind the scenes of Joyful DVM, particularly in relation to my cat, Willow, who had not been feeling very well. Well, I'm happy to report that she has spent more time at the Vet school. She's doing well at this point, clinically. Her respirations are now down to about 20 respirations a minute, which is a vast improvement over her high of 200. And as, although we don't have a definitive diagnosis yet, we've ruled out a whole bunch of things and so far she's proven to be two things. Number one, steroid-responsive, and number two, averse to taking any medications. I vastly overestimated my ability to medicate this cat, which has been a humorous and frustrating experience for me. The good news is the one medication I have been able to get into her so far has made a difference, and as diagnostic test results have come in, we've been able to eliminate some of the others. Stay tuned out for a final diagnosis on this one, but the quick update today is that she is improving and overall doing quite well.

So let's take a look now at four causes of Vet Med misery. So what are four things that are really common as far as creating a lot of the suffering that we experience? You could also consider these things as the four things that we most likely identify as what goes wrong in our profession, why this profession is hard. Maybe that's another way that we could look at this.

So, there are four things that come up, time and time again, as I work with clients, and as I consider my own experience in the profession over the past 20 plus years. Those four things are: handling stressful client interactions, coping with unexpected patient death, surviving board complaints and negative performance reviews, and negative online reviews as well. So those are the four things.

So how do we deal with those the fact that these things exist? Those are our greatest challenges, day in and day out, in Veterinary Medicine, and they are the reasons that a lot of us tend to be unhappy and frustrated and really just kind of miserable in our jobs. So I want to take a look at each of these to share a little bit of an alternative perspective on them and start to show you how you can actually take away the power that these things may have right now in regard to how you feel and your job satisfaction, and the overall outcomes that you have in your life. So those four things again: stressful client interactions, unexpected patient death, board complaints and negative performance reviews,

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 2

and negative online reviews. Particularly, we're talking about hospitals though they can be individual doctors, and they are slightly different than the first one regarding board complaints and performance reviews.

So if we think about client interactions, many of us would say, "Man, I would like Veterinary Medicine if I didn't have to deal with the client". And what's really interesting about that is that this year we've had more opportunity than ever to deal primarily with the animal with minimal input from the client. We've actually found this to be a little more challenging than many of us expected.

Overall, whenever we're working with clients, the reason that this becomes stressful for us is all about what we believe about the interaction. It's many, many layers for each of us, as far as what creates the way that we feel here, but what it never is is exactly what the client says. So as much as we would like to conclude that client interactions would be less stressful if clients would just be nice; if clients would be respectful; if clients would agree to our recommendations or follow through with what they said they would do; as much as we would love to believe that those things would decrease our stress around the client interactions, none of those things actually will. Because that's not the component of the client interaction that creates the emotion that you feel. That's not what creates stress. It's all about the story that we tell ourselves about the client interaction.

At the end of the day, it's simply words spoken between two people. It's very neutral all by itself. It doesn't have any ability to actually make you feel happy or sad or angry or frustrated or stressed or worried. It's the way we interpret the conversation and the expectations we set for it, including expectations of ourselves that create the stress for us. When we are looking for external validation of our abilities and of our successes of the patients through client interactions; when we're looking for confirmation that the client agrees with what we're saying; and when we are interpreting words to the contrary as failures, that's why it all becomes stressful. But at the end of the day, all that's really happened is that people spoke words. There wasn't any interaction with a client and the rest of it, including the drama, are all optional.

Now, what about patient death, specifically unexpected patient death? Many of us have a very hard time coping with unexpected patient death and of course, we would. Unexpected automatically shows us that we did not anticipate that the patient was going to die. Where we get into trouble here from an emotional standpoint, is that when a patient dies unexpectedly, we often automatically blame ourselves. This is compounded perhaps by a client interaction, particularly if they also blame you. What this limits us from doing though, is actually looking at the situation strategically and analytically to determine what happened. And oftentimes even when we can find actual data points to support that we did not kill the patient, the story in our minds just won't let us off the hook.

The way we judge ourselves in the management of the case continues to reinforce the idea that we

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 3

were at blame to blame. The way that we think that we solve this one is to avoid patients from dying; to do everything that we can to keep them alive. And you've probably recognized that you don't have a lot of ability to do that. We can always just do the best that we can with the information and resources we have available. We can make the best medical recommendations. We can approach our procedures with the best intent. And sometimes patients are going to die. Sometimes they're going to die because we've made a mistake, but more often they're going to die because of things that we couldn't control or predict.

What we need to do to feel better about these things is to allow those experiences to feel uncomfortable and not to believe that we have to change those or eliminate those experiences before we can enjoy the rest of our jobs. We're never going to be happy when patients die, but we don't want to be. That's the part that we miss out on. We don't want to be happy when our patients pass away, but we also can accept their death. Intentionally, feel that unhappiness and not feel the responsibility for it at all. It's that responsibility that makes coping with unexpected patient deaths so hard. It's not the death of the animal. The death of the animal is simply a circumstance. It's the story around the patient's death; the responsibility that we've placed on ourselves for that outcome that creates so much suffering and misery for us in this job.

Now, what about board complaints and negative performance reviews? None of us enjoy these things. Of course, we don't! We're not supposed to. The goal here is not to feel great about somebody filing a board complaint against you or to feel all sunshine and roses when somebody gives you negative feedback. But the solution is also not to avoid board complaints and to avoid performance reviews because ultimately those things are not things that you can control. All you can do, once again and I'm going to sound like a broken record, is you can only make the best decisions that you can with the information and resources you have available.

I'm going to guess that you always make the best decisions that you can. That doesn't mean that you have all the information. That doesn't mean that next time when faced with a similar decision, that you're not going to make a different decision because of what you learned through this decision. But what I do guarantee is that in this decision, you're trying your very best; that you're making the best decision that you can. And just like every other human, living the human experience, all you can do is your best. You can take that action. You can evaluate the outcome. You can learn something and you can go again and perhaps attack it differently the next time around. Where we get all caught up in, especially when it comes to board complaints and performance reviews, is that we forget that part where we've done the best that we can.

Motive is everything. And so we think that getting a board complaint or getting a negative performance review is part of the reason that we hate this job; part of the reason that we struggle in this job or that we're miserable. But what we miss is that a board complaint and a performance

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 4

review are simply results of somebody else's actions. Somebody else made the choice to turn you into the board. Somebody else evaluated your performance and put that on a document and presented it to you.

You are never going to be able to control the humans. So you can do whatever you need to do, and you do it exactly the right way, and some people are still going to turn you into the board. Some managers are still going to review your performance in a negative way as if it was a negative performance. What you believe about those situations creates the misery for you. If you think you could have avoided it by just doing your job better, you're wrong. I want to say that again if you think you could have avoided it. So you think you could have avoided a board complaint and you could have avoided a negative performance review by being better at your job, I want you to consider that you're probably wrong about that. Each of our journeys is individual and these things - the ability to turn somebody into a board or to provide a negative performance review - they're outlets for two completely different intense, and if we consider what those are, then we can often evaluate ourselves in a different way. So we can decide what we believe about and move forward.

So board complaints - why is it even possible for the public to turn us into the board? Well, if there truly has been a medical error, then there is this path for a client or really anybody to alert our licensing agencies to that. If it's a continuous problem, then it might be a situation where those agencies need to step in. But it's not very often that that happens. What I mean by that is it's not very often that somebody ends up losing their license over board complaint. It's really important to see that because we're so terrified if somebody's complaining about us to a board that we try to do everything right, and this creates a situation where we believe there is a right way to do things and any way that would result in a board complaint must have been wrong. It's all just very erroneous thinking and it has us believing that we're not good at a job that we're actually very well qualified to do.

Performance reviews are similar. Many of us are terrified of negative feedback. The reason we're terrified of negative feedback is because we see it as a reflection of what we already believe about ourselves, but that's not a thought process that we recognize. Instead, we just know that we're doing it wrong. That they're unhappy with our performance. That we need to do it better. And we miss what the whole purpose of our performance review is, which is simply to provide us with information so that we can consider that information and adjust our course moving forward if we want to.

Both board complaints and performance reviews are simply data points. They don't create any kind of emotion for us, which means they don't create misery and they don't create suffering. But if we don't know that, then we'd give them a lot of power and oftentimes a lot of negative power in our lives. We work then to avoid those things from happening so that we can avoid the way that we will

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 5

feel or anticipate that we will feel when they do. All of this, trying to mitigate what the other humans do, is a very wasted effort. And it never produces an outcome that we actually want.

Now, let's talk a little bit about negative online reviews. As technology has advanced over the last few decades, the ability for our keyboard warrior to jump on our website or our Facebook page or a Yelp page, and write a negative review about us individually or about the practices that we work at has become more and more available. It's super easy for people to jump on and just spew out whatever they want. We dread these things. We don't like to find out about these things. And when we do, we often panic. If we're asked why we're panicking over these kinds of reviews, it usually boils down to the thing that was written about us or about our hospital that isn't true. It's not the way that it actually is. And that becomes a problem because of what we believe that information out in the universe is going to create for us. We think the solution then is to make sure once again, that we're doing everything right, because if we do everything right and everybody's happy, then we can avoid negative online reviews.

Once again, my friends, I just want to remind you that you can't control the humans. And so if we continually show up in our jobs and approach all of our cases and even our client interactions through this lens of trying to prevent them from leaving a negative review, then what happens is that we lose the focus on why they are there in the first place.

Veterinary hospitals exist to serve clients and treat patients. That's our bottom line. That's why we are where we are. If we shift our focus to keeping clients happy; to doing everything in our power to make sure that they don't have an uncomfortable conversation with us; that their patient doesn't die unexpectedly; that they don't turn us into the boards; that they don't leave us a bad review; If we took and put our efforts to those things, then we actually missed the entire reason that we serve. We're there to treat patients and to serve clients. We're not there to make sure that everybody's happy along the way. That's not our responsibility. When we make it our responsibility, this job gets about a hundred times harder. We lose focus on where we actually do have an impact, and we never develop the skills of being able to handle stressful client interactions; of being able to cope with those unexpected patient deaths; of being able to survive the board complaints and the negative performance review; and being able to really understand the impact of an online review that is negative. If we don't develop those skills and instead we put our efforts to just simply trying to avoid those situations altogether, we become burned out very quickly because we're spending our focus and energy on things that are not within our control. We are failing to put our focus and energy on the things where we can make a positive impact. And by doing that, our patients actually miss out on our care at the highest level and our clients do too.

So what can you do about it? First off, just recognizing that client interactions, patients that die, board complaints, performance reviews, and even online reviews, that those things are all going to be part

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 6

of this job. Just recognizing that they do exist in our job and in our profession, that's the first step. We can't stop any of these things. This is all just part of the deal, but it doesn't have to mean anything at all about our abilities. It really doesn't.

So instead of trying to fight these things from happening at all and trying to control the other people, if we can just allow those things to exist because they're just part of the experience in this career that we chose, that in it of itself will start to release the pressure that you've put on yourself to be perfect.

Perfection will never stop these things from happening. Your individual performance or lack thereof didn't ever cause them to happen in the first place. This one tiny little shift in understanding where responsibility actually exists can make a huge impact. Then you have the opportunity to understand it even further.

These are the types of things that we do inside of Vet Life Academy, and actually, inside of Vet Life Academy, we have focused-topics on each one of these things. There are already modules inside of Vet Life Academy with how to handle stressful client interactions and understand them so that they don't have power over your day to day livelihood and your emotional wellbeing.

There's an entire module developed to help you learn how to cope with unexpected patient death. This one actually helps you to understand why it's so hard when it happens, and how to reconcile the events in an analytical way so that you can separate out and learn the lessons that you need to learn here, but also not carry around that guilt and regret forever.

Surviving board complaints and negative performance reviews, there's a focused-topic on that as well. So a masterclass and workbooks exist with each of these that help you to dig a little bit deeper beyond the surface of these things happening and that belief that many of us carry around that they shouldn't be, and if we were doing our jobs right, that they wouldn't. Instead, we can dig into these and understand why it is they are so devastating when they do happen. But then also recognize the opportunities that they provide for us and how we can adjust the way that we think about them so that they don't have to ruin our days or ruin our careers completely.

And finally, negative online reviews, the impact of those, seems to be more present now. And the only reason it seems to be more present is simply because technology has advanced and there are more opportunities for people to leave reviews on a very detached keyboard, warrior style kind of way. Add to that, the pandemic and curbside service where a lot of our interaction is in some kind of written form, it makes perfect sense that the number of negative online reviews has gone up. That does not mean that the level of the service you provide has gone down. Unfortunately, that's a conclusion that many of us are drawing.

Episode 29| 4 Misery Makers That Make Vet Med Careers So Hard (and what you can do about it!)

FULL EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

| 7

And in January of 2021, we are going to dig into this. So if this is something that you've been struggling with, you definitely want to join us inside [Vet Life Academy](#), so you can participate in that live master class in January and work with us during the month as we dig into these negative online reviews, understand what they really mean, and see the opportunities that exist for ourselves and our practices as a result of what appears to be a pretty awful situation.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, my friends, but these four things often come up, over and over again, as the reasons why we struggle in our jobs; why we are unhappy; and why we believe that we never can create a happy job as long as we stay in Veterinary Medicine. It's just not true, but we don't understand what's really happening, and so therefore we definitely don't know how to fix it for ourselves.

If you'll join us inside of [Vet Life Academy](#), right away, you get access to content along these lines - so all of these things that we just talked about here today on the podcast. In addition to all kinds of other information that can help you right away. We'd love to see you in Vet Life Academy and to learn more about how you can join us, just go to joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy to learn more.

Alright, my friends, that's going to wrap it up for this week and I'll see you next time.

Thank you for listening to the Joyful DVM Podcast. If you'd like to learn more about the concepts and ideas discussed here, and how to apply them to your own life, to create confidence and empowerment for yourself, you'll love Vet Life Academy. To check it out and learn more, visit joyfuldvm.com/vetlifeacademy. And if you're loving this podcast, I'd appreciate it if you'd share it with your friends and leave us a review on iTunes.

We can change what's possible in Vet Med together.