



# Is Private Practice Practical?

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All For Paws Animal Clinic  
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## The Clinic

All For Paws Animal Clinic opened in 2018 as a small animal veterinary practice serving the New River Valley, owned by Dr. Virginia Butler. I joined the staff as a kennel technician in the Summer of 2021, eventually moving to being a veterinary assistant in the early Spring of 2022.

The clinic itself is located in an ideal location, on the very end of the New River Shopping Center and right next door to PetSmart. During my time at All For Paws, I have been able to observe the innerworkings of a small, privately owned veterinary clinic and understand the labors that come with maintaining a private practice.



## My Role

When I first started at All For Paws, I was a **kennel technician** whose job centered around the animals boarding within the facility. Eventually, I started as a **veterinary assistant**, working directly with clients and patients. My responsibilities in each of these positions can be seen below.



**Kennel Technician:** My duties include caring for all boarding animals, which includes feeding, walking, administering medication, bathing, grooming, and generally providing any extra attention needed while staying away from home.

**Veterinary Assistant:** My duties include intake and triage of clients and patients, running in house bloodwork, urinalysis, and fecal tests, restraint, documentation of appointments and history of patients, management of invoices for clients, filling of non controlled prescription medication, maintenance of cleanliness of all facilities, drawing up and preparation of vaccines and medications, and client education in the aspects of proper dosing and administration of medication given at home by owners.



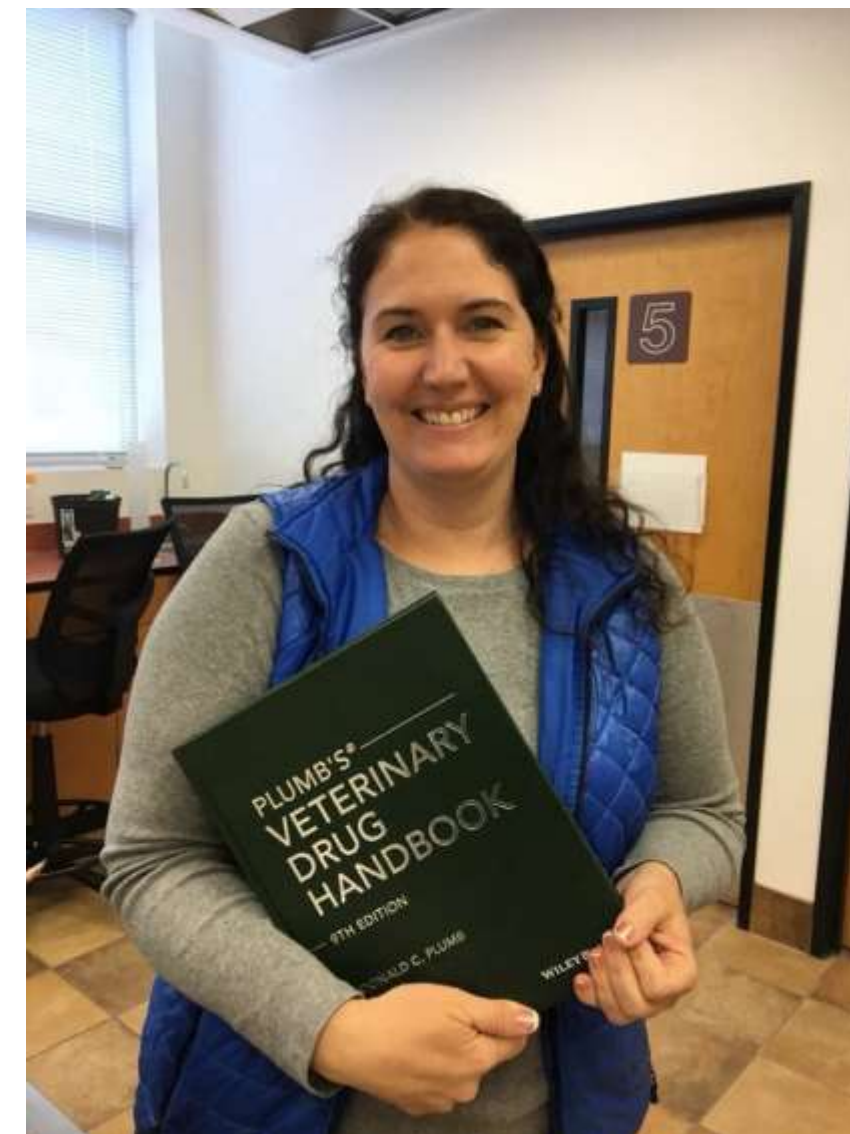
## Overview of my Experience

**Experience:** My capstone experience encompasses the entirety of my job at All For Paws Animal Clinic. I started in May of 2021 and will be continuing to work here until after my capstone is finished. Using my experience as an employee within the clinic, I was able to see the employee management and general operation of All For Paws at a much more in-depth and personal level.

**Project:** The project itself was conducted as a series of interviews with the current staff seeking the more information on what happens behind the scenes. I was especially interested in the management of employee stress and burnout as I know these are both very prevalent in the field of veterinary medicine.

## Interviewing the Staff

To begin my interviews, I spoke with the owner and head veterinarian, Dr. Virginia Butler, about how the clinic has changed overtime, the struggles of opening and finding a clientele base, and managing staff all the while operating a veterinary clinic. Dr. Butler has been practicing veterinary medicine since 1994. She had no experience with business ownership before All For Paws but through hard work and a drive to give back to her community, she opened a successful private practice that now serves over 5,000 families.



She started out with a clear set of **goals**. Namely to providing a **high-quality veterinary service** in a nonjudgmental and approachable environment and **building connections with clients and their pets** and being able to **educate the public** in the ways of veterinary medicine.

**Finding a clientele base** in an area already filled to the brim with veterinary clinics was no easy task. Dr. Butler contributes the clinic's success in this area to **listening to those in her community**, as well as her own experience living in the NRV, and **taking these needs into consideration** while building her business model.

When asked about her **goals for the future**, Dr. Butler hopes to **grow her staff** to encompass at least **one to two full time veterinarians** along with **four licensed veterinary technicians** with their own veterinary assistants and teams. She would also like to **expand the services offered** to include more **internal medicine, orthopedic surgeries, ultrasonography**, and even stepping into the field of **exotic animal medicine**.



The other subject of my interviews was the practice manager, Becca Stephens, who actually started out as a receptionist. She also had no experience in veterinary medicine prior to starting at All For Paws four years ago and was surprised just how similar animal medicine and human medicine can be at times. As she had no experience in veterinary medicine, especially in running a clinic, this position held a bit of a learning curve for Becca with some of the hardest things being general HR management and managing burnout in the staff.

Becca decided to focus heavily on the **employee management** aspect of her position, ensuring that the **general staff were not overwhelmed**. She used methods like instituting a **surgery point system** to not overload doctors, **limiting the number of new clients** each day per doctor, ensuring staff have **adequate time off**, and **hiring diligent and capable staff** to help support her employees indirectly.

While managing the staff is of the utmost importance, Becca also had to **ensure she did not end up burnt out**. To do this, she had to **delegate different responsibilities**, which turned into the creation of **shift leaders**. These shift leaders are **licensed veterinary technicians** who are directly **responsible for the veterinary assistants** and act as the **first responder to any client questions or issues**.

When asked about **goals for the future of the clinic**, Becca's answers differed slightly from Dr. Butler's. She said that would like to continue to **add more doctors to the staff**, a sentiment shared with Dr. Butler, but also would like to reach a **plateau of sorts in terms of quantitative growth**. This would entail **keeping a steady stream of business** and a **balance between the number of staff and clients** to ensure that the **business can truly flourish and grow**.

## Implications of My Findings

Overall, I found the interviews themselves very enlightening to the time, work, and dedication it takes to operate a successful private practice. When it comes to business, it can sometimes feel as though the owner or manager must make a choice between the success of their business or the happiness and mental health of themselves and their staff.

A 2021 study titled "A Preliminary Study on Assessment of Wellbeing Among Veterinary Medical House Officers" included a questionnaire to assess the mental health of 103 veterinary residents, interns, and fellows and was administered in two sections over the course of two years but held the same questions.

The results of the study showed a **high level of burnout** across both years in three separate categories. These were emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. When it comes to the level of **emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment**, respondents rated among a **high burnout level** for both. The third category, **depersonalization**, had respondents ranked in an **average burnout level**. (Chigerwe et al., 2021)

	Year 2017	Year 2018	Combined 2017 and 2018
Emotional exhaustion (EE)	29.5 (3-50)	27 (7-51)	27 (19.5)
Depersonalization (DP)	7 (0-26)	6.5 (0-23)	7 (9)
Personal accomplishment (PA)	32 (13-44)	33 (19-47)	32 (10)
Number of respondents	60	43	103

EE scores of  $\leq 18$ , 19-26 and  $\geq 27$  indicate low, average, and high levels of burnout, respectively.

DP scores of  $\leq 5$ , 6-9 and  $\geq 10$  indicate low, average, and high levels of burnout, respectively.

PA scores of  $\geq 40$ , 39-34 and  $\leq 33$  indicate low, average, and high levels of burnout, respectively.

Studies like this can only show us the patterns occurring in our own society, it is up to us and our colleagues to actively take matters into our own hands and better the veterinary community as a whole. This change is most important when it comes to those in power in clinics, which is why managing staff and burnout is so important in our lives today and is one of the driving reasons I sought to speak with the staff at All For Paws. I wanted to see what efforts were being taken to facilitate a step forward when it comes to the mental health of veterinary professionals.

As someone who was on the working end of the policies and protocols put into place by the leadership at All For Paws, I can affectively say that their efforts to create a friendly, non-judgmental, and positive veterinary work environment have been successful.

## Conclusion

This experience was and will continue to be one of the defining parts of my undergraduate college career as it has truly opened my eyes to the magnitude of and effort it takes to open and manage a small, privately owned veterinary clinic. I truly believe my time with All For Paws has been one of great learning and experiences.

Not only did I improve and build upon my resume, but I also made connections within the field that I am so very passionate about. I have been able to become a part of a community that values education and responsibility above all else. I look forward to my future with All For Paws and within the veterinary field as a whole.



## Citations

Chigerwe M, Barter L, Dechant JE, Dear JD, Boudreaux KA (2021) A preliminary study on assessment of wellbeing among veterinary medical house officers. PLoS ONE 16(6): e0253111. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0253111>



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