

FRESH START

Entrepreneurs (from left) Caitlin Keat and Alyssa Mages co-founded Empowering Veterinary Teams.

PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Changemaking as Entrepreneurs

Kate Boatright, VMD

Passion: It's something that all veterinary professionals need to make a lasting impact in the profession. This manifests as passion for patient care and enriching the lives of clients. For some, their passion drives them to create businesses that provide much-needed services to clients and patients. Others are motivated to improve the lives of veterinary professionals and tackle the tough issues our profession faces.

Here are the stories of 5 entrepreneurs who took their passion for the veterinary profession, combined it with a desire for positive change, and created businesses to deliver much-needed services in innovative ways.

Virtual VetTechs Supporting Veterinarians Remotely

"I always felt like I was supposed to do something meaningful," says Jenica Veley, RVT. As a child, she watched her veterinarian mother build her practice from the ground up in Ontario. Veley "saw all the things that went into [practice ownership] along with the tears and stresses behind closed doors. When [my mom] had a solid team, so much of the stress was lessened, and I never forgot the change that made for her."

After becoming a registered veterinary technician in 2008, Veley worked in several practices throughout

Ontario. These experiences allowed her to learn more about practice management and to observe similar struggles across many practices. Veley spent more than 2 years looking for ways to support practices while researching virtual assistants and virtual businesses in other fields. She officially launched Virtual VetTechs (virtualvettechs.com) in 2020 while on maternity leave with her third child and currently contracts with 7 veterinary nurses/technicians. Her company aims to support veterinarians by providing remote customer service that includes managing phone calls, scheduling appointments, and performing patient follow-up. Veterinary nurses/technicians employed by the company can utilize their education and training within a more flexible working environment. Veterinary clinics that work with Virtual VetTechs can prioritize the clients and patients in the clinic while many of the traditional reception duties are managed remotely. Additionally, Virtual VetTechs provides content creation and client education. Their services continue to expand as the team grows.

Empathos Veterinary Wellness Rediscovering Professional Joy

For some entrepreneurs, like Danielle Alleman, DVM, business ownership was not a part of their original plan. Alleman's journey to business ownership started

in November 2020 with a commitment to post her thoughts and feelings on social media twice a week. “I had no idea how it would grow, or what I would turn my thoughts into, just that I wanted to start somewhere,” she shares. As a 2017 graduate from Cornell University, Alleman experienced burnout multiple times in the first 3 years of her career. “I felt like I couldn’t find resources or a community to talk about how I was feeling,” she says. “Once I started having conversations with other veterinarians who felt similarly, I knew I wanted to create a business around helping people find joy in their career again.”

Through Empathos Veterinary Wellness (empathosvet.com), Alleman provides one-on-one coaching, group programs, resources, and education focusing on teaching personal development and resiliency tools that will help veterinarians, especially those early in their career, to thrive. In the fall of 2021, Alleman hosted a virtual veterinary wellbeing conference called Eudaimonia, which offered 2 days of lectures on physical, mental, and financial health, along with mentorship, communication, and more.

For Alleman, entrepreneurship has allowed her to create a more fulfilling career than she would have had in a traditional clinical path. She currently splits her time between Empathos Veterinary Wellness and relief work in the clinic. She is excited to see where the future goes as she continues to grow and fine-tune her mission.

Empowering Veterinary Teams Changing the Face of Team Training

For other entrepreneurs, the idea to start a business came from a need for change. Alyssa Mages, CVT, and her friend and business partner, Caitlin Keat, MS, found themselves exploring ways to continue to develop professionally while improving balance within their personal lives in 2018. After 18 years in clinical practice, Mages had seen the struggles faced by veterinary teams. She observed a “lack of standardized and comprehensive training programs” for both onboarding and professional development.

Their company, Empowering Veterinary Teams (empoweringveterinaryteams.com), provides a wide



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US-PET-0208-2021-A



variety of services to veterinary professionals including in-clinic training, development of training modules and equipment, continuing education on both “human skills” and clinical skills, and content development. Additionally, the company works to give back to the veterinary community by working with other changemakers in the profession to tackle some of the pressing issues, such as the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion. After a soft launch in 2019, the company became fully operational in 2020. Due to the pandemic, their business model quickly transitioned to providing virtual training and lectures, but they are back on the road and presenting regularly at conferences as in-person events resume.

One of Mages’ favorite parts of the entrepreneurship journey has been “the discovery of so many like-minded and passionate people within [the veterinary] industry.” She enjoys “networking and collaborating with [people who are] no longer simply colleagues, but true and genuine friends.”

Pawsibilities Vet Med Improving Diversity Through Mentorship

You do not have to wait until after graduation to start on an entrepreneurial journey. Valerie Marcano, DVM, PhD, started in entrepreneurship while in veterinary school at the University of Georgia. Marcano shares that as a child, she was “exposed to a multitude of careers within the profession and [knew] that there were people like me” from watching her mother and colleagues. “Upon moving to the U.S., the lack of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the veterinary profession became increasingly obvious to me as I navigated the pre-veterinary and veterinary career,” she continues.

Along with Seth Andrews, PhD, she founded Pawsibilities Vet Med (pawsibilitiesvetmed.com). “Pawsibilities Vet Med uses the platform Pawsibilities, a virtual platform with the goal of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the veterinary profession through mentorship and professional development,” says Marcano. The idea formed during the 2018 Animal Health Hackathon at the University of Georgia. After a research period and soft launch, they officially launched publicly in September 2020 as a 501(c)3 nonprofit.

Mentorship is available for prospective veterinary professionals, both veterinarians and veterinary nurses from the pre-professional period through veterinary/ technician school and into their career. All are invited

to join the platform as mentors and provide support to prospective and future veterinary professionals.

MentorVet

Evidence-Based Support for Early-Career Veterinarians

“After experiencing burnout twice in my early career, I recognized the importance of mentorship and professional development to work through my own feelings of burnout,” shares Addie Reinhard, DVM, MS. “I felt a calling to ensure that others did not have to go through burnout and wanted to create something that would help vets thrive in their careers.”

During her master’s program, Reinhard explored ways to support veterinarians in their careers. Using evidence-based practices, she created MentorVet (mentorvet.net) with the help of Merck Animal Health. MentorVet launched its first cohort of mentees in July 2021 and went on to win the VMX Startup Pet Pitch Competition in January 2022. The program offers a combination of group and one-on-one mentorship and professional development sessions. The MentorVet team includes mental health professionals, financial coaches, and volunteers that are required to complete training before being assigned to a mentee.

“The MentorVet vision is to empower every veterinary professional to thrive within veterinary medicine,” Reinhard shares. The program works to support veterinarians at the most critical times in their careers, one of which is the early-career period. “Early research shows that the MentorVet program has the potential to prevent early-career burnout,” says Reinhard. She sees a future where the program can be scaled to support veterinarians at other points in their careers. Reinhard feels that “as we scale up this program, we have the potential to create systemic changes in the profession.”

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CHALLENGES

While the mission and vision of each of these companies are focused on overcoming challenges faced by the veterinary profession, they are all businesses that require time and energy to found, maintain, and grow. For those who are maintaining a full- or part-time job in the clinic, like Alleman and Marcano, finding the time to devote to the business can be challenging. Additionally, for those without business backgrounds, learning the nuances and legalities of opening and running a business can be daunting. Veley suggests

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1-2. Data on file at Boehringer Ingelheim.

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NexGard® (afoxolaner) Chewables

Brief Summary: Before using NexGard® (afoxolaner) Chewables, please consult the product insert, a summary of which follows.

CAUTION: Federal (USA) law restricts this drug to use by or on the order of a licensed veterinarian.

Description: NexGard is a soft chewable for oral administration to dogs and puppies according to their weight. Each chewable is formulated to provide a minimum afoxolaner dosage of 1.14 mg/lb (2.5 mg/kg).

Indications: NexGard kills adult fleas and is indicated for the treatment and prevention of flea infestations (*Ctenocephalides felis*), and the treatment and control of *Ixodes scapularis*, *Dermacentor variabilis*, *Amblyomma americanum*, and *Rhipicephalus sanguineus* infestations in dogs and puppies 8 weeks of age and older, weighing 4 pounds of body weight or greater, for one month. NexGard is indicated for the prevention of *Borrelia burgdorferi* infections as a direct result of killing *Ixodes scapularis* vector ticks.

Dosage and Administration: NexGard is given orally once a month, at the minimum dosage of 1.14 mg/lb (2.5 mg/kg). See full product insert for dosing table and details.

Warnings: Not for use in humans. Keep this and all drugs out of the reach of children. In case of accidental ingestion, contact a physician immediately. Keep NexGard in a secure location out of reach of dogs, cats, and other animals to prevent accidental ingestion or overdose.

Precautions: Afoxolaner is a member of the isoxazoline class. This class has been associated with neurologic adverse reactions including tremors, ataxia, and seizures. Seizures have been reported in dogs receiving isoxazoline class drugs, even in dogs without a history of seizures. Use with caution in dogs with a history of seizures or neurologic disorders.

The safe use of NexGard in breeding, pregnant or lactating dogs has not been evaluated.

Adverse Reactions: In a well-controlled US field study, which included a total of 333 households and 615 treated dogs (415 administered afoxolaner; 200 administered active control), no serious adverse reactions were observed with NexGard.

Over the 90-day study period, all observations of potential adverse reactions were recorded. The most frequent reactions reported at an incidence of > 1% within any of the three months of observations are presented in the following table.

Table 1: Dogs with Adverse Reactions.

	Treatment Group			
	Afoxolaner		Oral active control	
	N ¹	% (n=415)	N ²	% (n=200)
Vomiting (with and without blood)	17	4.1	25	12.5
Dry/Flaky Skin	13	3.1	2	1.0
Diarrhea (with and without blood)	13	3.1	7	3.5
Lethargy	7	1.7	4	2.0
Anorexia	5	1.2	9	4.5

¹Number of dogs in the afoxolaner treatment group with the identified abnormality.

²Number of dogs in the control group with the identified abnormality.

In the US field study, one dog with a history of seizures experienced a seizure on the same day after receiving the first dose and on the same day after receiving the second dose of NexGard. This dog experienced a third seizure one week after receiving the third dose. The dog remained enrolled and completed the study. Another dog with a history of seizures had a seizure 19 days after the third dose of NexGard. The dog remained enrolled and completed the study. A third dog with a history of seizures received NexGard and experienced no seizures throughout the study.

Post-Approval Experience (July 2018): The following adverse events are based on post-approval adverse drug experience reporting. Not all adverse events are reported to FDA/CVM. It is not always possible to reliably estimate the adverse event frequency or establish a causal relationship to product exposure using these data.

The following adverse events reported for dogs are listed in decreasing order of reporting frequency for NexGard: Vomiting, pruritus, lethargy, diarrhea (with and without blood), anorexia, seizure, hyperactivity/restlessness, panting, erythema, ataxia, dermatitis (including rash, papules), allergic reactions (including hives, swelling), and tremors.

Effectiveness: See full product insert for details regarding Effectiveness.

Animal Safety: In a margin of safety study, NexGard was administered orally to 8 to 9-week-old Beagle puppies at 1, 3, and 5 times the maximum exposure dose for a total of six treatments. There were no clinically-relevant effects related to treatment on physical examination, body weight, food consumption, clinical pathology (hematology, clinical chemistries, or coagulation tests), gross pathology, histopathology or organ weights. Vomiting occurred throughout the study, with a similar incidence in the treated and control groups, including one dog in the 5x group that vomited four hours after treatment.

In a well-controlled field study, no adverse reactions were observed from the concomitant use of NexGard with other medications.

Contact Information: For a copy of the Safety Data Sheet (SDS) or to report suspected adverse drug events, contact Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health USA Inc. at 1-888-637-4251. For additional information about adverse drug experience reporting for animal drugs, contact FDA at 1-888-FDA-VETS or www.fda.gov/reportanimalae.

The information provided here is not comprehensive. The full FDA-approved product insert is available at www.nexgardfordogs.com. Consult your veterinarian for further information.

Product approved by FDA under NADA # 141-406

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Reference package insert: 1050-4493-09 Rev. 11/2019

Brief summary preparation date: 08/2020

US-PET-0735-2020

talking over ideas with multiple people, including “at least one that is knowledgeable about the veterinary industry, one that understands business start-ups, one in marketing, a lawyer, and an accountant.” She continues, “Businesses do not start in a vacuum, so make sure you are clear about what you want to offer, why you are motivated to offer it, have come up with solutions to any questions your support people may have, and get your business on solid legal ground.”

Mages notes another hurdle for entrepreneurs who are trying to make changes in the profession: “It’s getting less and less, but there is still a resistance regarding a new approach to doing things. Change is inevitable, but that doesn’t mean it isn’t scary.”

ADVICE FOR FUTURE ENTREPRENEURS

A common sentiment shared by these entrepreneurs is the importance of community during business development. Each shares stories of how connecting with others has helped to empower their mission and support their journey. “We can’t do anything on our own, and the most successful initiatives are the ones that are collaborative,” says Reinhard.

Any veterinary professional can take an idea on how to impact the profession and turn it into a business. All agreed that while laying some groundwork is essential, waiting until you feel fully prepared or have a perfect plan is impossible. “If I waited until I felt ready to start my own business, I would never do anything,” says Alleman. “It’s OK to feel uncertain, but all you have to do is just get started.” **TVP**



Kate Boatright

Dr. Boatright is a 2013 graduate of the University of Pennsylvania. She currently works as a small animal general practitioner in western Pennsylvania. Her clinical interests include feline practice, surgery, internal medicine, and emergency medicine. As a freelance writer and speaker, Dr. Boatright enjoys educating students and colleagues about overcoming stressors in the profession, including communication, team building, wellness, and the unique challenges facing recent graduates.