



HERE'S A SECRET ...

These “Terrible Things” Aren’t That Terrible

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My eyes were gradually coming back into focus, and the fog was lifting: “This case is dismissed.” I barely remember that day, when my first and, so far, only veterinary board complaint was dismissed. I still had my license. I still had my job. In fact, there had been no explosions, no news reporters, and no disaster plan needed.

Nothing makes you question everything quite like a certified letter with your name on it. It might represent a board complaint, a legal action, or a cleverly disguised credit card offer. I had been living in fear for months since I was informed that an owner felt I was negligent. The patient in question presented in such poor condition that, at first, I thought it might have already died. It was a patient my team rallied around for hours. A patient who died despite our efforts. I had spent months suspicious of every owner, rereading my medical records, and quadruple-checking every treatment sheet.

And now it was all over. My efforts, anxiety, and panic were unfounded. Everything was fine. I had lost a few hours in necessary medical records review and an afternoon at work for the board proceedings. I had also lost confidence, countless hours of sleep, and even a toenail (thanks to stubbing my toe while running this case through my mind). At one point, I was sure my career was lost and spent an afternoon looking up the requirements for truck-driving school. I was basically a wreck, and for what reason?

Do you know what actually almost ended my career? Practicing and living in that quagmire of emotions. As a brand-new group of veterinary professionals graduate this year, I promise that the fear of something bad will be present. Avoiding medical mistakes, board complaints, and getting sued will always be in the back of your mind. If you spend every day focused on those, you will miss the excitement of solving medical mysteries, the accomplishment of successful surgeries, and the satisfaction of working with a team of veterinary professionals on a difficult case.



Someone once told me that if you stay in veterinary medicine long enough, you will get sued and taken to the board. Both of those things have happened to me and almost all my classmates on this celebration of our 22 years since graduation. But we have also gotten advanced degrees; specialized; and found exciting careers in industry, ownership, and international organizations. You can spend your career looking backward, covering your every move, or you can choose to spend your career looking forward, exploring every possible path and opportunity. But I promise, you can only see in one direction at a time, and we were built to look forward. **TVP**

Ben Kirchner

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This column is titled “The Secret Life of Vets” so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.

