

Forward-thinking nursing skills

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Introduction

Forward-thinking is about being proactive instead of reactive. Learning to think ahead and then apply that knowledge on how to take care of your patient is key to offering the best veterinary care for patients. Too often veterinary technicians are told to “follow the doctor’s orders” when really they play an equal and valuable role in the overall patient care and outcome.

What forward-thinking is NOT

- “Just following orders”
- Yielding to tradition
- It’s always been done this way
- Creative approaches are not tried
- You become biased
- You dislike the owners, so you don’t provide best care
- You are right - all else is wrong
- You close the door to suggestions
- You stop looking

Traits of a forward-thinker

- Inquisitive
- Knowledge
- Independence of thought
- Want to learn
- Self-confidence
- Open mindedness and flexibility to consider other alternatives
- Honesty
- No bias

Be inquisitive

You cannot be the best technician for your patient if you do not:

- **Interpret:** Understand and explain the meaning of information or an event
- **Analyse:** Investigate a course of action that is based on data.
- **Evaluate:** Assess the information you receive and determine if a reaction is needed.

Constantly think WHY? Knowledge is power and is the first step of forward-thinking skills. The more you know the better for the pets You can’t think ahead if you don’t know what you don’t know.

- Question
- Get the answer
- Apply it

Skills you must have to critically think

A good understanding of normal vs. abnormal (bloodwork, TPR, etc) is imperative in helping you stay grounded in what you do know. Being sure you have the ability to react and voice concern is equally important. All the knowledge won't help if you never speak up. Invest in a good stethoscope so you can monitor patients well. Pay attention to detail and seek answers when you don't know something.

Embrace your inner nerd! Read books, journals, and articles. Watch webinars or quick video clips and listen to podcasts. The nerdy the better! You will get the best forward-thinking skills if you investigate everything your brain asks as "why".

Self-confidence

One of the main reasons veterinary technicians fail to have forward-thinking skills is because of imposter syndrome. Impostor syndrome (IS) refers to an individual believing that they are not as competent as others may perceive them to be. Ultimately IS is linked to the individual's perception of how society views them. Impostor syndrome affects every person on the planet no matter their social status, work background, skill level, education, or expertise. One study estimated that 7 in 10 adults experience IS at some point in their life.

Impostor syndrome results in:

- Self-doubt
- Attributing your success to external factors
- Never allowing yourself to celebrate your wins
- Fear that you won't live up to expectations
- Overachieving
- Sabotaging your own success
- Anxiety due to a fear of failing
- Depression because of a perceived failure

Identification is key:

- Do you agonise over any mistake? Big or small?
- Do you feel you've never earned anything on your own?
- Do you feel like you will eventually be seen as a phony or fraud?
- Do you downplay your own expertise? Are you embarrassed when someone says "great job" to you?
- Do you feel you are underserving of success?
- Do you fail to pursue promotions or opportunities because you feel you aren't good enough?

Recognising you are experiencing from IS is the first step to you taking steps to creating a better outlook about yourself.

Steps to overcoming imposter syndrome

Separate feelings from facts: Chances are you'll feel the imposter syndrome villain at some point in your life. When you start with the self-doubting thoughts, stop. Peel your feelings away and stick to the facts.

Learn to praise yourself: Stop with the constant self-defeating thoughts. Instead, celebrate your wins. I dare you to put yourself out there and ask others to join in and celebrate with you. It's an uncomfortable space to be in.

Stop comparing: Focus on own achievements instead of holding them up against others. With social media and news available around the clock it can easily seem that everyone is more successful than you. Are you happy with your success? If you are not, is it because you feel like you should be “more” because of others. Ask yourself, “what do I want for myself?” That should be your goal.

Talk to others: Chat with a friend or colleague and ask them to provide you feedback in the area you are struggling with. If you are really struggling, consider a therapist or social worker to give you pointers on overcoming the imposter syndrome. A career counsellor can also help you overcome your thoughts of ‘I feel like I’m not my best’.

Be honest

Be sure you understand your own limitations and errors. Get comfortable with the phrases:

- I don’t know
- Maybe you are right
- That’s not my area of expertise
- I believe you may be wrong
- Not you are wrong...start with the ‘I’ statement

Recognise and acknowledge your own bias

That’s right. Unfortunately, veterinary professionals also have bias. We have them against certain breeds, species and our human clients.

Veterinary biases because medical professionals to not offer the best care or treatment for a particular patient because they have a bias in their mind that a client will not be able to afford it. They may withhold sending home pain medication because they believe that the client may use it for themselves. They may believe that the client is making up symptoms because they believe that a certain race or gender is more prone to lying. While it’s hard to imagine it happening it does. Every person on the planet holds biases. It’s important that when we are practicing medicine, we look to keep ourselves in check.

How to teach this to the team

Teaching forward-thinking nursing skills starts with everyone though it is often driven by leadership. Everyone needs to create a culture of polite, kind, and honest communication. The culture should include praising those who ask WHY. Doctors should be educated that why is good when asked of them. Technicians should ask and challenge each other. Doctors should ask “do you know why” and then focus on educating.

The team should want to share their knowledge and cultivating a culture of learning and educating is key. Leadership and the entire team should not tolerate other team members that are in the habit of stifling others. Incorporate the ‘why’ and ‘ask questions’ culture into the new hire orientation program so new hires are encouraged and expected to ask questions.

Lastly, consider morbidity and mortality rounds. This is a great way to bring open communication about events that could’ve been done differently and opens up the lines of communication. If possible, closing the clinic for half a day or even an entire day to discuss the case and allow for healing is always beneficial.

To succeed

- Pay attention
 - Come in to work clear minded!
- Communicate What Your Patient Needs
- Own your patient
 - It's a team approach at ALL times
 - It's not the doctor's patient
 - You don't just follow orders

Conclusion

As a veterinary technician/nurse you play an equal role to the success or failure of the patient in your hospital. You should not just follow orders. You should think first, use all the knowledge you have and then offer the next care for your patient. Remember that doctors are people too and if you think something should be done differently speak up! It's your patient too!!