



**A collection of personal stories from Veterinary Nurses suffering from a Chronic Illness or Condition.**

### **A personal story by Becky Winter**



So, here I am, fifteen years into a Veterinary Nursing career and contemplating how the last three years have changed my life for better and for worse.

My name is Becky, I am an RVN. Three years ago, I received a diagnosis which changed my outlook on life and indeed my career – Multiple Sclerosis.

What?

Why Me?

What did I do to deserve this?

What is my future now?

So many questions filled my head and new ones pop up on a weekly basis. My first thoughts were let's get these legs moving and get out of this wheelchair, my brain was struggling to cope with being housebound any longer. Six months on from that diagnosis I was walking with crutches – I wasn't ready to give in without a fight! After a few more weeks the crutches went, and I was looking more like the Becky that everyone expects to see.

At the time, I had needed to leave my previous job role, so I found a new job at a small animal practice close to home and from the start I was honest with them about my capabilities. This, for me, was a good career decision and I am grateful every day for my wonderful colleagues who make my life so much better!

## **Daily pain – really is a pain!**

Every day I am in some degree of pain, although I have become a pro at hiding it well and it is never really under control.

My immune system is battered, so I am open to every illness going. Bladder weakness means the toilet is my best friend and that the change of clothes in my locker (which was for when I was covered in blood, vomit, or anal glands) is now an essential piece of kit for when the bladder control fails!

Imposter syndrome is also an issue for me. I see the student nurses and younger RVN's picking up things quickly, restraining animals with ease and I watch on, wondering if I can really do this job. However, experience in this career outweighs brute strength 100-1, so I am definitely on the stronger team! I figured they have backs and knees that work, so let's use them while we can.

Having an invisible illness is a struggle. When I have a relapse and use a crutch, I receive a lot of unwanted attention, which I don't like, so for me, invisible illness suits me more!

However, on some days the pain hits hardest and I want to sit and cry in a corner. A hand on the shoulder or a cuppa makes a massive difference, even better if I get to drink it warm – a rare thing in the veterinary world.

## **Self-Care**

What is this? We hear it all the time but what does it actually mean?

Well, it means different things to different people. For me it is taking some time out of the week to look after my mental and physical wellbeing.

- Pilates
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Relaxing Bath or shower
- Sitting in the garden with my guinea pigs and dogs
- Walking my dogs when my pain allows
- Crafting – painting, sewing, making resin / clay items
- Running my little Body Shop at Home business

All these things provide me with some level of relaxation and mental stability. They allow me to switch off from some days that cause me stress and anxiety. This makes a huge difference in my daily life.

When I focus time on other activities, I find my pain does dissipate for a while and my tensions and anxieties reduce massively.

If I could pass on advice to anyone in a similar situation to mine, it would be to let others help you, accept their offers and don't try to push through when you are struggling. You are important and

should strive to put yourself first in every situation – this knowledge and self-awareness comes with age and experience!

