

# Case Study: Veterinary Surgeon - Helena

## What do you do?

Although I do some part-time work with small animals, I am primarily an equine, or horse, vet. Most of my patients are show jumpers or hunters. I travel around a fair amount, visiting the horses that require my care. It can involve a great deal of late night and weekend emergency work.



## What is your background?

As a child, I had always liked helping animals, so when I started riding horses in my early teens, I knew straight away what I wanted to be - an equine vet. With this goal in mind, I got as much experience with as many animals as possible before applying for veterinary school.

Once I was at vet school, my summers and any other spare time I had were spent working part-time with small animal clinics and experienced equine vets.

## What characteristics do you need to be successful in your job?

Obviously, a vet has to be comfortable dealing with animals. Vets also have to be adaptable.

New kinds of treatments, therapies and technologies are constantly evolving, and we have to stay well-informed. It's also important to have good communication skills - it's important to keep concerned owners informed.

## What other jobs could you do using the skills from this job?

A vet might choose to become a salesperson for an animal pharmaceutical company or a nutritional consultant for companies in the agricultural sector. Some use their skills to breed, train or show animals.

## What changes will there be in the future?

Because it is becoming more and more expensive to own and maintain a horse, fewer people are buying them.

As a result, there's a chance that there will be less demand for equine vets in the future. However, small, more affordable animals like dogs and cats continue to be popular. Demand for small animal vets should therefore remain strong.

Large animal vets are starting to use portable technologies which allow them to diagnose medical problems on the spot.

And, vets in general are having to learn to deal with sophisticated and knowledgeable clients who demand a lot for their money.

## Are there many opportunities to enter this career?

There are different ways to practise as a vet. Many work in towns and cities, treating mainly domestic animals, such as pets. Others just work in rural areas, and some do a mixture of the two. Then, you've got people who specialise further, such as myself.

However, if you are interested in being a vet, you should realise that it's very competitive to get into vet school. But if you think that you've got what it takes, you should go for it.

## What do you like about your job?

The first thing I love is being on the road. I like going to new places, seeing different people and different horses.

The second thing I like about my job is finding out what the problem is, where the horse is ill and solving the problem.

Thirdly, the best part about it is that you're always being presented with new and different problems.

## What do you dislike about your job?

The first thing is the long hours. I can get called out at 3 in the morning, go back out at 7am and come home at 8pm. That's really, really, long.

Second thing: it's physically demanding. Especially when dealing with particularly large horses.

Thirdly, and probably the worst thing, is trying to collect money for work you've already done. It's really, really hard, and they don't teach you that at vet school.

## What advice would you give to someone interested in your career?

Well, you can't just decide to be a vet because you love animals. It isn't as easy as it might appear. You've got to be prepared for some things that you don't like doing, like putting animals to sleep.

## A day in the life

9:00 am - 10:00 am

Calling into the office for messages, speaking to clients on the phone, setting out a schedule for the day, organising my equipment.

10:00 am - 4:00 pm

Visiting clients and their animals.

4:00 pm - 7:00 pm

Taking care of an emergency call: performing surgery on an injured animal.

7:00 pm - 8:00 pm

Driving home, putting away equipment, checking messages.