

Working
to make
alternative
tracks the
status quo

ALTERNATIVES

IN VETERINARY MEDICAL EDUCATION



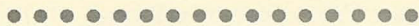
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Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights

After Alternatives

An Interview with a Former Alternatives Student

In 1990, Jennifer Kissinger was responsible for the implementation of an alternatives track at Ohio State University. As a third-year student, Jennifer conscientiously objected to the use of live, healthy nonhuman animals as "practice subjects." After nearly a year of requesting faculty and administrators to allow her to learn surgery via humane alternatives, she was told that she would be failed and expelled if she did not participate in the traditional surgical laboratories. Subsequently, Jennifer filed a lawsuit against the school with the help of Professor Gary Francione, Director of the Rutgers School of Law, Animal Rights Law Clinic. Within five months, OSU developed a curriculum for Jennifer and any other student who now chooses not to harm and kill animals in the pursuit of a veterinary education.



"I have worked with Dr. Kissinger for two years, and I can say she is one of the most competent surgeons I have seen. She knows her anatomy and has excellent technique. I am very pleased with the surgical training she received."

—Dr. Jan McGough, Seattle, Washington



Q. Dr. Kissinger, what were your reasons for pursuing an alternatives track?

A. The reasons I pursued this track stem from my respect for animal life. Since the traditional courses ended in the euthanasia of healthy, innocent animals, it was hard for me to justify my participation in these courses. I had only to look as far as human medical schools to realize that the traditional methods in veterinary schools were outdated. Medical students learn through practice on cadavers, models, and by assisting in surgeries of true patients, under the direct supervision of surgeons, until they gain enough exposure and experience to handle more and more roles as primary surgeon. If this training is good enough for human surgeons, it should be good enough for veterinarians.

Q. Tell us about your training and how it differed from the traditional track.

A. The traditional track required ten surgical exercises, in which three



Dr. Jennifer Kissinger

students were assigned to each animal. The animal was killed after each exercise. Students rotated in the role of primary surgeon, assistant surgeon, and anesthetist, which means each student was primary surgeon only three or four times. With this arrangement, it was possible to actually graduate without doing many routine surgeries as primary surgeon.

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Hiding In Tomorrow

by Tess Peavy, Ross University
(written to express her dread of practicing surgery on live nonhuman animals)

Angel of Mercy
Take me away
Sweep me into tomorrow
Past the end of this day
Let me finish with goodbyes
Let my heart start to heal
I'm not right with what I'm doing
Help me hide the way I feel

From my knife to his death
Will that day ever come
It seems to take a lifetime
To get this job done

They say one day we'll smile
And look on the bright side
But that is no comfort now
When there is no place to hide

If the pain was just a moment
If this moment would pass
If my heart wasn't aching
If this dread didn't last
If goodbyes didn't linger
If the scars didn't stay
I try every morning
To see things that way

Time is a demon
It keeps moving on
Too quickly for most
Too slowly for some
But just when I need it
To pick up the pace
It lingers and lags
And stays in one place

And they say time heals all
And that will make it all right
They tell me it could be easy
If I just think of it right
As a due that needs paying
As a sad part of life
Maybe I could think that way
If I didn't think twice

If I could just see the future
The places I'll go
When I am far from this place
When I can say "no"

It might help heal today
And soothe the pain yet to come
If I could hide in tomorrow
And in the time when I'm done

After Alternatives

CONTINUED FROM FRONT PAGE

As an alternatives-track student, I did almost 20 live-animal surgeries as compared with traditional-track students, who were primary surgeon or assistant for only six or seven live-animal surgeries. Not only was I primary surgeon for every required surgery, but I repeated each surgery at least three times, first practicing on a cadaver, then assisting in the surgery of actual patients, mostly at local veterinary hospitals in the area, and finally performing each surgery on a patient with supervision. In the traditional course, there were two to three professors to every 15 or so students. I had one-on-one supervision throughout each procedure.

I did perform two of the more difficult required procedures, gastrotomy and cystotomy, with the client's consent, on a terminally ill dog named Tiffany. Tiffany gave me invaluable experience, not at the cost of her life, but rather at the end of her natural life.

Q. Do you feel that pursuit of an alternatives track affected your ability to get a job?

A. That is one of the main concerns facing a veterinary student considering an alternative surgery course. How will future employers view this nontraditional training? In my case, because I felt that my surgical skills were comparable to those of any new graduate, how I obtained my training was not a big issue. I was offered a job by one of the first few practices that I interviewed with.

Q. How do you personally feel about your surgical abilities?

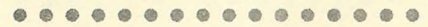
A. I feel I have succeeded well in my endeavors as a veterinarian. Recommendations from my employers have stated, "Dr. Kissinger has performed beyond expectations and we value her very much," and "I would highly recommend Dr. Kissinger be accepted to your surgical residency program."

Q. What long-term effects has your pursuit of alternative surgical training had on you?



"Dr. Kissinger has terrific tissue-handling skills. Her surgical technique is certainly up to par with any other veterinarian who has worked with me."

—Dr. Cady Barns, Turner, Maine



A. Because of the adversity one experiences when being different from the norm, I developed an outstanding commitment and fervor not to fail in my goals. I had a unique passion to prove myself. I was going to be the best surgeon there was, just to prove it can be done without killing helpless animals. It is this kind of true passion that can lead to great things. It can be done. You just have to make it so. We owe it to ourselves and we owe it to the animals we have devoted our lives to care for.

EDITOR'S NOTE: IN 1996, DR. KISSINGER PURCHASED THE BERKSHIRE CAT HOSPITAL IN LENOX, MASSACHUSETTS. WE WISH HER CONTINUED SUCCESS!