



# Putting Patient Care First

**Dr. Jennifer Fowlie of Calgary, Alta., is the first recipient of the Buddy and Dr. Snead Award in Small Animal Care. The 2007 WCVM graduate shares some of her thoughts about patient care, communicating with pet owners and “going the extra mile” for people’s pets.**

**Q. Did this award come as a surprise for you?**

I can’t express how much I appreciate receiving this scholarship: it was an unbelievable surprise. There were a lot of very deserving people in my class, so yes, it was quite unexpected.

**Q. Why do you think you received this honour?**

I believe that Dr. Snead nominated me for the award — she had been my supervisor during the small animal medicine rotation. During that time, I had a lot of intensive care patients all at one time including a dog hit by a car and a very sick dog with diabetes.

There were a couple of weeks where I lived and breathed small animal medicine! There was one day where I stayed all night to treat my intensive care patients because the people on call were busy with multiple emergencies. Dr. Snead said that I put patient care ahead of everything else and went further than expected to ensure that my patients had the proper care.

**Q. What did you think of that rotation?**

I loved it — I know that sounds crazy, but I really did! The rewards you get from the experience far outweigh the drawbacks, and I learned so much

from working with the veterinarians at the college who are experts in their fields.

**Q. What did the experience teach you about communicating with pet owners?**

One of the owners was an elderly lady who was having trouble understanding the complex treatments for her diabetic dog. I spent a lot of time talking with her on the telephone, making sure that she understood everything.

I think we have to remember that there’s a person attached to every animal. What I’ve found is that people really appreciate it when you draw them pictures, show them X-rays and do whatever you can to help them understand what’s going on with their pets.

If pet owners can understand the problem and all of the potential treatment options, then I think they’re more at peace with the choices they make in the end.

**Q. What do you think has helped to shape your approach to patient care?**

I’ve always felt that the bond between humans and animals is an extraordinary thing. Based on experiences with my own pets and working with other people’s pets, I know how much an animal can mean to someone. If you go the extra mile to ensure the best care for an animal, it’s very rewarding. It’s a pretty awesome job we have: being able to provide that kind of service to animals and people.

**Q. Can WCVM teach students how to be patient advocates or is it part of people’s personalities?**

I think it’s both. I suppose you need to have to have the desire to put animal care first (over things like your own sleep). And then you gain more skills in school: “the how’s and what’s” behind veterinary medicine

**PATIENT ADVOCACY AWARD** (from left to right): L. David Dubé and his wife, Heather Ryan, present the “Buddy and Dr. Snead Award in Small Animal Care” to Dr. Jennifer Fowlie. The Saskatoon couple presented the \$7,000 award to Fowlie during the 2007 WCVM Graduation Banquet in June. The annual scholarship, which was created by the Heather Ryan and L. David Dubé Foundation, recognizes a fourth-year student who has provided compassionate care for their small animal patients and has acted as their advocate.

that give you the tools to care for your patients. As for talking to clients, all of those skills come with practice. I think it takes a lot of patience and understanding on our part.

**Q. The award is named after WCVM clinician Dr. Liz Snead. What does she teach about patient care?**

Dr. Snead used scientifically-based reasoning and the latest advancements in veterinary medicine to provide the best care to her patients. With every case, she would ask, “What is the best possible thing that we can do for this pet and this owner?”

She would start from there and sometimes economics or other things got in the way — but her number one goal was always shaped by that question. I think that’s amazing how she can maintain her focus on what’s best for the patient and owner — and that’s something I really try to remember as I start every day.

**Q. Dr. Snead’s relationship with “Buddy” (the donors’ cat) inspired this award. Does one patient stand out for you?**

I’ll never forget the diabetic/ketoacidotic dog that I treated during my small animal medicine rotation. She was critically ill when she came in to the clinic. We talked to her owner about the poor prognosis and treatment options, and she decided that she wanted to try. Jasmine eventually went home and since then, she has been doing very well so it was one of those incredible success stories that keep us going.

I’m grateful that I got to help such a kind person and her pet. Every day, I think how lucky I am to have the job that I do.

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