



## 10 Year-Old Vet Assistant Scrubs In

Would you let a 10-year-old assist in the exam room? What if she had the same certification as the other veterinary assistants? Turns out she does! At a veterinary hospital in Olympia, Washington, 10 year-old Courtney Oliver is working alongside her mentor, Dr. Michelle Shoemaker, as a fully certified veterinary assistant. And you thought kids were only motivated by Hannah Montana.

She may have to stand on a stool to reach the exam table, but Courtney is just as qualified as her adult co-workers. To receive her certification, she completed the college-level course work in eight months through an online program. She can explain X-rays, has her own stethoscope and keeps animal specimens from her family's pets in her bedroom. She's the real deal, and by the time she's the veterinarian in her own animal hospital, she'll have almost a lifetime of experience.

Courtney's passion for animals first led her to a local 4-H club, but when she was told she was too young to join, Courtney sought a totally different route. Her mother, who homeschools Courtney and believes in encouraging her daughter's dreams, found an online program that didn't specifically ask for Courtney's age. With support from Dr. Shoemaker for the field study requirements (learning to sterilize and glove up), Courtney eagerly took on the material. For a graduation gift her parents gave her a set of custom-sized scrubs and lab coat.



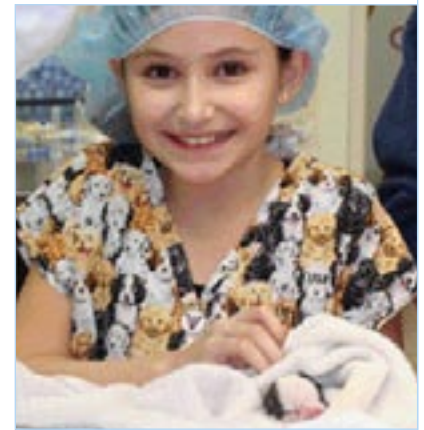
For her own safety, Courtney does not draw blood, and as per state law, does not take X-rays. Although she has to get permission

from pet owners to perform on their animals, Courtney has assisted with a C-section on her own dog. The Oliver Family breeds and shows Boston Terriers, so Courtney doesn't know life without dogs. She is now working on getting Canine Massage Therapy training to learn more about muscle and bone structure.



Courtney's story has received national attention and intrigue. She's been featured on the local news, in newspapers, and has even appeared on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*. People are amazed not only that she has accomplished at 10 what most accomplish in their twenties and older, but that at 10 she knows what she wants to accomplish when many adults never figure it out. Her story is also a great example for other kids—they are never too young to have an impact in their own lives and in their communities.

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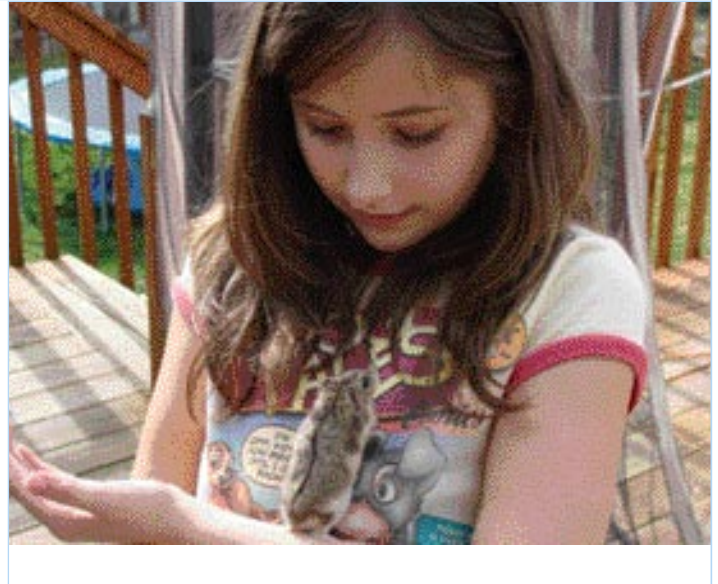
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Kids are wonderfully innocent and positive about their dreams. They make no excuses. A genuine love of animals is what made Courtney ask, “Why can’t I do this?” Instead of brushing her off, Courtney’s parents agreed. It’s important to encourage this passion and interest for animals in young kids. And, if in your clinic you encounter children like Courtney who are serious about pursuing a career in veterinary medicine, give them some guidance and maybe let them volunteer at the hospital for a day. There may be some special kids in your community who want to take on what Courtney has. If we’re lucky, these ambitious and bright kids will be the future of animal healthcare some day. 🐾

– Erin Riojas



## Bringing a New Associate into the Practice

**D**o the veterinarians in your practice feel overworked and overwhelmed? Is it harder than ever to squeeze in all the animals that need to be seen? If so, it might be time to look into adding a new doctor to the group. Practice management consultant Mike Fleischman of Gates, Moore & Company in Atlanta says a simple way to identify when it’s time to begin recruiting is to look at whether client access is being restricted. “If it’s eight weeks until someone can get in, that’s an indicator,” says Fleischman.

Another sign that help is warranted is when veterinarians are consistently working longer hours than they’d like or don’t feel they can take vacation time without putting an undue burden on their colleagues. Fleischman says that when doctors start saying they’d rather have more time off than make more money, then it’s time to start recruiting. Keep in mind that in a multi-doctor group, everyone should agree that it’s a good idea to add an associate. Since recruiting can take several months, try to anticipate when practitioners are nearing the point of feeling overworked. Don’t wait to start the search process until every doctor in the office is exhausted.

As you consider bringing on a new associate, first crunch the numbers. “Be sure they can cover their overhead,” says Fleischman, “or at least their own salary.” While this won’t happen immediately, you should be able to project with reasonable certainty when a new doctor will be at a break-even level and when they will ultimately become profitable. Since many expenses in a practice are fixed (rent, utilities, computers, phones, etc.), going from, for example, one doctor to two won’t double the overhead. If your group already has several partners, the addition of

each new one should have less and less financial impact. Nevertheless, be prepared to add a salary, benefits, malpractice insurance, and perhaps an additional staff member when a new veterinarian comes on board.

Once you’ve hired a new practitioner, make sure he or she gets up and running with a full schedule as quickly as possible. Here are a few ways to help make that happen:

- Send an announcement letter to all active clients and referral sources
- Introduce the new doctor before he or she arrives by displaying a poster in the reception area that includes a bio and photo
- Update your practice brochure and Web site to include the new doctor
- Place a “welcome to the practice” ad in the local newspaper
- Hold an open house to introduce and welcome the new doctor – invite clients, referring doctors and key community members
- Arrange for the new associate to network and speak at community events
- Make sure that staff members can answer questions about the new doctor, such as his alma mater, previous experience, certifications and credentials, and any areas of special interest or expertise

Recruiting a veterinarian is a major decision. However, if you think it through carefully and make sure that your new associate gets off to a strong start, your clients and other staff members will breathe a sigh of relief. 🐾

– Karen Childress

# The Scoop on Newsletters

Putting out a newsletter is one of the best ways to increase awareness of your services, strengthen relationships and establish your unique practice brand. If you incorporate all the elements that readers expect to find, your newsletter will look professional, even if you create it yourself using only desktop publishing software.

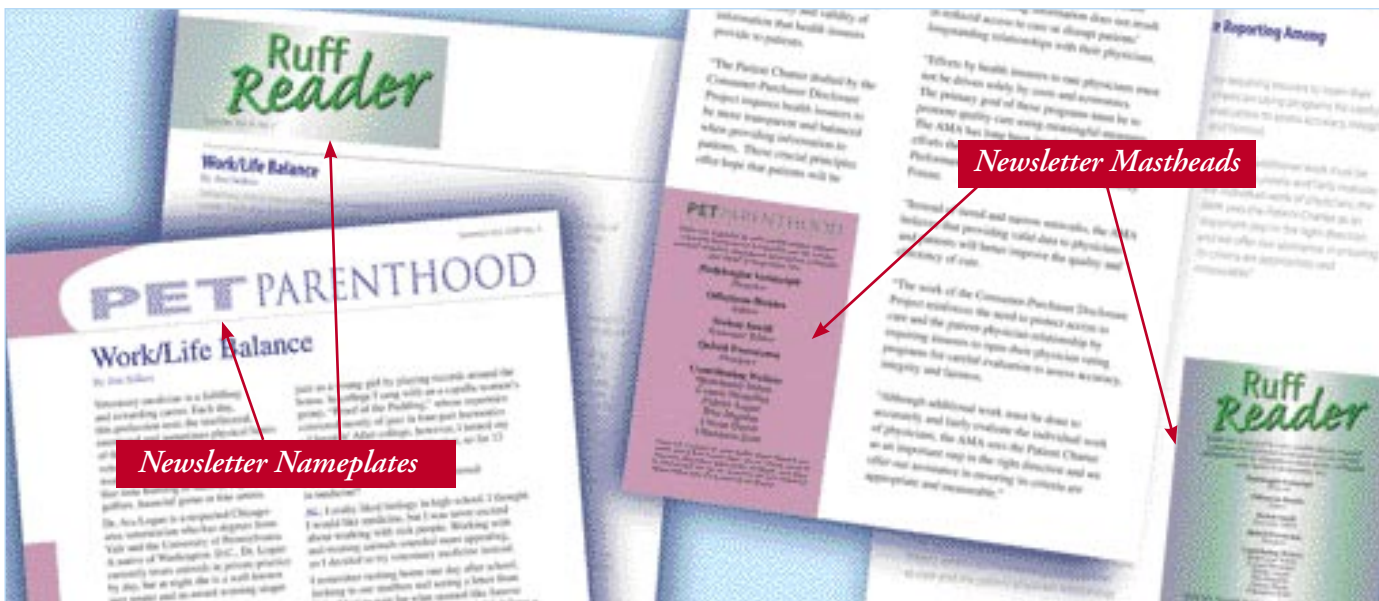
When designing your newsletter, start with the sections that will remain the same from issue to issue, such as the nameplate, table of contents and masthead.

The **NAMEPLATE** is usually at the top and center of the front page. It's where readers find the basic information: newsletter and/or practice name, logo, date, and issue number. Try experimenting with fun or unusual fonts for your nameplate, but make sure it's easy to read and fits the image you want to convey.

Within the nameplate, you might want to include a tag line – a statement of the unique knowledge or service your newsletter or practice offers to the community. Avoid superlatives in tag lines; it's more important to be clear and concise than to be exciting.

The **MASTHEAD** is where you list the names and titles of your newsletter staff members. You might also want to include your address and phone number as well as any legal information, such as your reprint policy. For short, two- to four-page newsletters, the masthead is usually on the back. For longer newsletters, it might be on the inside front cover or the inside back cover.

Below are some sample newsletters.



Your **TABLE OF CONTENTS** should be on the front page so that readers can quickly see what's inside. Make your table of contents stand out with a special font or a shaded box so it doesn't look like part of your lead article.

Create a consistent design throughout the newsletter: use the same font for all your articles, same amount of space between page elements, same justification for the titles (such as left, right or centered), and same sophisticated color scheme.

Choose the content for your newsletter with your readers in mind and consider what information will be most beneficial for them. Then create a format that includes space for recurring columns as well as for articles that cover a different topic in each issue. Your regular columns might include a nutrition spotlight, publication and book reviews, a calendar of events in your practice, a letter from you to the readers, or questions and answers.

To make gathering news easier, consider signing up for mailing lists of relevant organizations, such as local and national associations, nonprofit organizations, federal and state agencies, state and local chambers of commerce, and colleges and universities. If one of these organizations sends you a press release that is well-written and of interest to your readers, feel free to print it. Press releases aren't copyrighted, so you can use them verbatim or edit them as you see fit.

Sending a newsletter lets your community know that you care about providing them with helpful, credible information. The next time a patient has a healthcare question, he or she just might come to you for the answer. 🍷

– Jim Sellers

For additional ideas on creating a quality newsletter, visit the following web sites:  
[www.librarysupportstaff.com/4createmail](http://www.librarysupportstaff.com/4createmail)  
[www.ehow.com/how\\_2069344\\_create-newsletter-ms-publisher](http://www.ehow.com/how_2069344_create-newsletter-ms-publisher)  
[www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Professional-Looking-Newsletter](http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Professional-Looking-Newsletter)  
[www.microsoft.com/education/persuasionnewsletter](http://www.microsoft.com/education/persuasionnewsletter)

## Dear Pulse Pal

May is National Physical Activity and Sports Month – time to get moving!

After an especially tough winter in many parts of the country we're finally enjoying longer, warmer days. That means it's time to get outside for fresh air and recreation. If you haven't been keeping your New Year's resolution to exercise more, now's the time to get re-energized and get ready for summer.

Take your pets, children, nieces or nephews out for some active play. You'll set a good example while getting some exercise yourself.



Find an exercise buddy – perhaps someone you work with – and commit to walking on your lunch hour or cycling after work a few days each week.

Join a sports league – you might find many new exercise buddies. Many community recreation departments offer low-cost adult leagues for all interests and ability levels. Consider tennis, soccer, volleyball, ultimate Frisbee, or softball to get moving and make new friends.

Plant a vegetable garden. Spend the summer months digging, pulling, hauling, harvesting, and enjoying the fruits of your labor.

For more ways to get into action this spring and beyond, visit [www.fitness.gov](http://www.fitness.gov). There you'll find the President's Challenge Activity List and a link to resources for getting involved during the month of May. And don't forget to remind your clients to get out and exercise and to bring their pets, too.

I hope this article has inspired you to get out there and get moving. Have a great summer! 🍷

– Michelle Olken  
Director of Brand Management

## PAW PRINTS



*Dear Pulse of Your Practice:*

*When a veterinarian is behind schedule clients get annoyed and understandably want an explanation. How much should I tell them about what's going on behind the scenes?*

– Katie in California

Dear Katie:

Give clients enough information that they don't feel like you're dismissing them, and recognize that their time is valuable. You can say, "I'm so sorry. We had to work in a couple of animals and that put us a bit behind." But don't stop there. Provide a realistic estimate of how much longer the wait is likely to be. If it's going to be 45 minutes, don't say 15. Then, offer the client options, such as:

- If it is more convenient for you to reschedule, I could give you the first appointment of the day on . . .
- If you'd like to go for a cup of coffee, I can call your cell phone when the veterinarian is almost ready to see you.
- We have other magazines in the exam rooms – is there anything special I could try to find for you?

Showing empathy, being honest, and offering clients choices will go a long way in calming tensions and building good client relations.

– Karen Childress

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