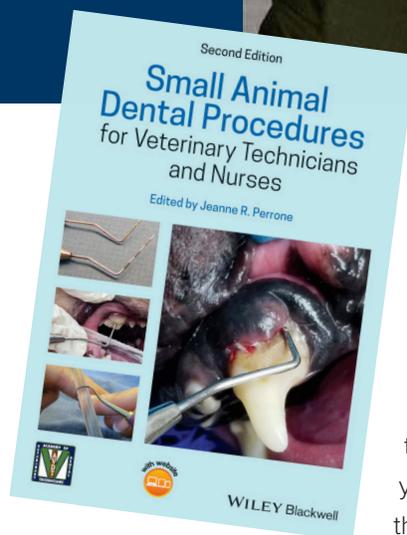


MEET THE WOMAN WHO WROTE THE BOOK ON SMALL ANIMAL DENTISTRY FOR VET TECHS. LITERALLY.



A quick search on Amazon pulls up a recent second edition of *Small Animal Dental Procedures for Veterinary Technicians and Nurses*. It's by Jeanne R. Perrone, first written in 2012. She's a pioneer in dentistry, from working in a clinic with just a polisher and scaler to creating the VTS program in dentistry.

"My start in dentistry started in tech school in Illinois and we got our basic dental education," Jeanne said. "I had been part of a dental cleaning when I was in tech school and then I graduated and moved into general practice. And the first practice I worked at, they said, 'You're going to do all of the dental cleanings.' And this was before the amount of equipment and protocols that we have now!"

"It was very stone age, if you will. I was in charge of cleaning teeth and I did probably seven to 10 cleanings a day, standing up. We just had a scaler and a polisher. At my second practice, the doctor was going for his board certification in dentistry. I went from nothing to everything. He got me going to the veterinary dental forum and learning how to take X-rays and helping manage his dental practice at this clinic."

OPPORTUNITY UNFOLDING

The VTS specialties rolled out emergency and critical care first. Anesthesia was second. Dentistry came third. Since Jeanne had so much experience, she was asked to help create the VTS program.

"The dental college decided they wanted to put together a group of technicians to start the VTS program in dentistry. They gathered a group of us at the dental forum; at the time I was secretary of my state association in Illinois. They said, 'You have that state association – we're going to make you chair with the organizing committee for the VTS program and dentistry.'"

Jeanne had been doing some lecturing on regular photographic slides on dental radiology at the local tech school. But this was going to be much bigger than that. "Now, it just folded into this big, huge undertaking. I chaired the organizing committee for the veterinary technician specialty group in dentistry, overseen by our national association, NAVTA." NAVTA is the well-known National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America.

Jeanne continued, "We got our specialty group approved in 2000 and we graduated our first class in 2006. Now we have at least a hundred technician specialists globally. We have quite a few in the United States, but we have one in Scotland, one in Australia."

Reflecting on how she went from polisher and scaler to designing education, Jeanne told us, "Dentistry has always been a part of my wheelhouse, and then I started to learn how important the education side of it was. I started with this specialty group – we started teaching



labs, lecturing and getting the word out about how important dentistry is. I found the American Veterinary Dental College had the very same educational mindset and we worked together. So, without actually saying, 'We're going to make change,' we made change by being more present in the veterinary market."

MAKING A MOVE

Tired of winters, Jeanne left Illinois and moved to Florida and worked with a dental group in the Tampa area. "I worked in-clinic full time until 2015 and then decided to go into clinics to teach dental, radiology positioning for the most part, and help clinics with equipment and any questions they had."

"I was teaching at St. Pete College because they wanted to do a dentistry course. And at the time I was the person to ask because I had built up this group from the ground up."

"I was kind of the pioneer, if you will. I did a lot of things I wasn't necessarily comfortable doing, but I felt there was a need for it and to make it happen. I had to speak in public, and I learned how to teach, and how to write a course. I work for companies like Patterson Veterinary and Midmark that sell equipment and I will train how to use the equipment. But my forte has been dental radiology positioning."

AN EVOLUTION AND A REVOLUTION IN DENTISTRY AND DENTAL HEALTH MONTH

"Definitely, dentistry evolved over my entire career. Dentistry back when I started was just something clinics did, and nobody really knew why. It was just like, 'Oh, we've got to clean teeth and it's probably good for the patients.'"

And then Dental Health Month came along. "Februarys were insane because clinics would do discount dentistry only in February. It started to get recognition at that point and has now changed and evolved into standard practice. Now lots of clinics are getting dental X-ray capabilities. Now we're having the conversations about how important it is to have preventative dentistry versus catch-up. The knowledge base has actually grown."

Jeanne has contributed widely to that knowledge base through books, teaching and now, videos.



Jeanne created videos to help vet techs communicate with pet owners. In this one, Jeanne brushes her dog Rhea's teeth and demonstrates how to do it right. Find the videos at healthcareforpets.com.

"In the last couple of years, I've done a whole bunch of videos just on pet parent questions about dentistry. And I'm loving that because it was probably one of my favorite things to do when I was working in practice – talking to pet owners about how important it is to be able to explain dental procedures to them. Not just tell them this is what we're doing and it's going to cost this much, but there's a reason for all of these things that need to happen to improve your pet's quality of life."

DENTAL MONTH EVERY MONTH

Now that February is becoming more of an awareness month, clinics can space out dental visits so it's not so overwhelming. Jeanne's advice? "Don't overload your schedule. Now that we have clinics doing full mouth X-rays, we can lower the number of cases the clinic takes in per day. And that gives you time to do nicely detailed charting, gives you time to have a conversation with the pet owner about their pet and what happens under anesthesia and if we have to do extractions, we're going to do nerve blocks, just like they do in people. This is a great opportunity for clinics to say, this is important for your pet's systemic health."

TWO BIGGEST BARRIERS FOR PET OWNERS

The two biggest reasons pet owners don't want to have dental procedures are – no surprise – anesthesia and cost, Jeanne finds. "Everybody knows somebody's cousin's uncle twice removed whose pet died from anesthesia. And with cost – pets do have to be put under anesthesia for dental cleaning and that drives the cost up. But we have such

better drugs than we did when I first started. We're doing medicine much better now than we used to do."

"If you follow a preventative dentistry stance, they won't be under the anesthesia long because they're coming in more often. And owners could incorporate home care products to that patient's dental care to help with costs." Jeanne added, "It takes a lot of work to get pet owners to comply."

Jeanne likes to have an extended conversation about the family's lifestyle. Are they a big, busy family with soccer practice and piano lessons? Are they struggling to put food on the table? "You have to kind of work around them. The biggest thing I teach is it depends on the patient's tolerance and it depends on the pet owner's ability and the pet owner's time. It's one of those things you really have to interview. I work on getting staff members to interview their pet owners and find out what can they do in a day or three or four times a week? What is possible for them? Because it's another imposition on their time and it really just depends on the situation. You also have dogs that don't like their mouths handled. It's a case-by-case decision; you have to take each case as it is, but it's important to get that information."

TRAINING DENTAL X-RAY AND BEYOND

Jeanne loves dental X-ray because it's such a powerful piece of diagnostic equipment. But it's the hardest to train. "There's a bit of an art to it. And it's not something I can go into a clinic and say, 'You're going to be pros at this when I leave.' It's a beginning. It's something you have to practice and do regularly to get good at it. I tell the clinics I visit, 'Now that you have all these people freshly trained, it's important to get them on your dental schedule every week so everybody gets a chance to use the equipment and practice on it.'"

Using the X-rays as a visual aid is also part of what Jeanne teaches. "I'm a big believer in getting clinics to print the X-rays and take them into the room on a laptop to share them with the pet owners. That's one of the conversations I have when I do training: 'How are you going to use these X-rays?'"

Using the dental chart as a client education tool is huge because you can actually show them where the problem was. You can show them what normal looks like versus what the dog's tooth looks like. When I worked in Florida for the Dental Specialty Group, that was my biggest job: I sent home all the patients and that's when I would walk them



through the dental chart, show them the X-rays, what we saw and why we treated it as such. We told them ahead of time, of course, too. But home care is so important. I teach that to technical staff, clinic staff. It's very important to be able to talk to clients well!"

ADVICE FOR THOSE THINKING ABOUT BECOMING A VTS

Having designed the education program and mentored many over the years, asking for advice for future VTS Dentistry students is a natural question for us to ask Jeanne. "It's a big decision to do it. There are requirements you have to fulfill before you apply – time in the practice. You have to have been working for many hours as a credentialed technician, and you have to devote quite a bit of your day to dentistry," Jeanne said.

"It's just not going to work for those technicians that are doing one day a week of dentistry; that isn't going to really fly because you're learning to become a dental advocate and you're learning not only the skills of doing dentistry, but you're learning to be a dental advocate for your patients and for educating pet owners."

About the specifics, Jeanne said, "It's a two-year program. You're set up with a mentor who is one of the VTS members. Usually, it's the person pretty close to you locally, but lately it's been whoever is free to do it. You have to turn in case reports, in a full set of dental X-rays, fulfill a certain number of hours of lab CEs, lecture CEs, which needs to be done by dental professionals. And collect case logs over all the different disciplines in veterinary dentistry."

Jeanne doesn't mince words when she says, "It's a lot of work!" But what about the rewards? "It's a pretty big commitment, but when you get done, I think the benefits outweigh all the work you've put in. When I finished getting this program off the ground, my vision was for all of these

technicians to become dental advocates who can talk to clients about dental procedures that need to be done. Or if they're working at a general practice and their patient needs to be referred to a dental specialist, they can speak to the pet owner about what to expect at the specialty clinics and why they need to go to the specialty clinic."

Jeanne added, "Don't just assume you have to stay in their clinic and take care of their own pet owners and patients. If you want to go to clinics and do training, you can do that. If you feel like you want to do lecturing, great – there's opportunities to lecture everywhere. If you want to teach dentistry at technician schools, there are opportunities to do that as well. It just depends on how you see yourself sharing this knowledge."

SHARING KNOWLEDGE

No one has shared this knowledge as far and wide as Jeanne – from her website to her book to her training to her videos. "We're there for doctors to call and ask questions. We're there for technicians to contact us and ask questions. We're on Facebook. We've been posting on LinkedIn. There's always somebody around to answer questions."

Because many more practices are purchasing digital dental equipment, Jeanne's current work is in training. But she always has more than one thing going on. "I am getting ready to teach my course for St. Pete College in the fall on dentistry. I've got to turn this new revised textbook into the course. I'm teaching for VetMedTeam. I have a few students I'm working with and helping them learn dentistry. I am working on an artificial intelligence Ask A Vet bot where a pet owner can type in a question and get an answer, then a veterinarian or a veterinary dentist or technician specialist can chime in and give more local advice, like 'This is a good clinic to go to.' I've always got my finger in something. And then I get phone calls from other VTSs for equipment ideas. I'm just there for people who need the help. I'm happy to do it."

Take advantage of the abundant resources Jeanne has created.

WEB AND VIDEO

Website - www.jeanerperrone.com

Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians - <http://www.avdt.us>

Healthcareforpets.com – Helping vet techs communicate with pet owners

THE BOOK

Small Animal Dental Procedures for Veterinary Technicians and Nurses, Second Edition

FACEBOOK

Veterinary Dental Technicians

LINKEDIN

VetMedTeam