



10 Things Your Veterinarian Wishes You Knew

By Dr. Marie Holowaychuk, author of *A Compassionate Calling: What It Really Means To Be a Veterinarian*

1

Many Veterinarians Wouldn't Recommend the Profession

Surveys show that less than half of veterinarians would encourage someone else to pursue this career. Why? Because of the emotional, financial, and personal toll it can take.

2

Veterinary School Debt Is Crushing

American veterinary students graduate with an average of \$189k in debt¹—often more—with salaries that don't match human medical counterparts.

3

They Often Work Long, Unpredictable Hours

Even if a clinic is open 9–5, many veterinarians work far beyond those hours. On-call shifts, emergencies, and late appointments are common.

4

Veterinary Medicine Isn't Just About Animals

Veterinarians spend a surprising amount of time dealing with people: managing client emotions, delivering bad news, and navigating financial limitations.

5

They Face Ethical Dilemmas Every Day

Veterinarians must often euthanize animals they could save—simply because a client can't afford care. These moments cause deep moral stress.

6

Compassion Fatigue and Burnout Are Common

Chronic exposure to trauma, grief, and suffering—alongside perfectionism and long hours—leads to emotional exhaustion.

7

Veterinary Suicide Rates Are Higher Than Average

Veterinarians are 2.5 to 4-times more likely to die by suicide compared to the general population.² Mental health stigma and access to lethal means are contributing factors.

8

They Carry the Weight of Perfectionism

The veterinary profession attracts high-achieving individuals who fear mistakes, internalize criticism, and feel personally responsible for patient outcomes.

9

They're Often Underappreciated

While they provide life-saving care, veterinarians are frequently subject to client incivility, online harassment, and unrealistic expectations.

10

Most Veterinarians Still Love What They Do

Despite it all, many veterinarians remain deeply committed to helping animals and supporting the humans who love them—driven by compassion, not prestige.

Want to learn more?

Explore the real stories, struggles, and triumphs behind the veterinary profession in *A Compassionate Calling: What It Really Means to Be a Veterinarian*, available August 18, 2025.

Learn more and bulk discounts available at ACompassionateCalling.com

¹Bain, B., Lefebvre, S. L., & Salois, M. (2021). Characteristics of and comparisons between US fourth-year veterinary students graduating with and without educational debt from 2001 through 2020. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 260(5), 559–564.

²Tomasi, S. E., Fechter-Leggett, E. D., Edwards, N. T., Reddish, A. D., Crosby, A. E., & Nett, R. J. (2019). Suicide among veterinarians in the United States from 1979 through 2015. *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, 254(1), 104–112.

