



JABATAN PERKHIDMATAN VETERINAR MALAYSIA

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OLEH:

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Courage for her chosen career

This young woman was resolute about becoming a veterinarian after encountering two cats in hit-and-run cases.

By DENEESHA RAVEENDRAN

VETERINARIAN Nur Aishah Abdullah, 25, made up her mind to become a vet one day, after she witnessed the death of her first pet cat at the age of 10.

"My first cat was hit and run over by a car," recalls Aishah with sadness. "I could see it taking its last breath in front of me but I could not do anything."

Her first rescue of a stray took place when she was 14. She found a cat struggling by the side of the road in another hit-and-run case. Aishah brought the cat home, nurtured it back to health, and found a caring home to adopt it. That spurred her on to continue saving strays. So far, she has helped more than 40 street cats and dogs.

Aishah is now a full-time vet at a pet clinic in Subang Jaya, Petaling Jaya, Selangor. She manages the clinic together with the wife of the previous owner, Dr G. Baskaran.

Last year, Dr Baskaran had a serious injury and needed someone to replace him in running the clinic. Aishah recalls, "I met Dr Baskaran in a clinic in Johor Baru, where I was working. He was a friend of my boss. During my conversation with him, he asked me if I was interested in helping out at his clinic. Well, I was willing to try," she says. And so she took the leap and relocated from Johor Baru to Subang Jaya to become an apprentice in his clinic.

"Being a vet is not an easy job. The responsibility of saving lives, and facing life-and-death situations breaks you a little, every time."

When Aishah joined the pet clinic - which serves all kinds of animals - she received a lot of criticism. The people around her did not fully support her, including her family and friends.

"There are vets who treat only one species of animals, such as cats only, and not dogs at all. Also, most of the vets (in Malaysia) do not accept exotic animals, such as birds, geckos and iguanas. But I do all of them," says Aishah.

"My mum asked, 'Why not become a doctor?' and she tried to change my mind quite a number of times," Aishah's mum, who was initially worried about the judgments her daughter would receive as a young Malay vet, eventually relented after Aishah managed to prove the value of her job.

During our interview, Aishah repeatedly says, "I am proud of my job. I feel like I hold the same responsibility as a doctor."

When asked about the criticisms she has faced working in this industry, she replies, "The most hurtful comments I have received are, 'It's haram', and other comments along the lines of 'Why are you touching dogs, don't you have a mind?'"

Aishah believes that vets cannot choose what species of animals they will or won't treat. The pledge a vet swears to abide by, going into the industry, is a firm commitment. Whether it's a sick cat or dog or other animals, those are lives to be saved. "I cannot say I do not want to serve them."

Sometimes, it is her age that seems to add to the pressure. Though she is a certified vet with loads of enthusiasm for animals, Aishah has had to exert double the effort of a regular vet to prove her worth because of her youth. Slight murmurs by customers have become a normal occurrence in her job. While looking over her pet patients, certain owners often whisper among themselves, in their mother tongue, wondering if this vet is doing the right thing and whether she is experienced and qualified enough.

Aishah has also experienced social media discrimination because of her job. "I use Instagram, and I also post pictures of me with my patients on my account. The last time, I posted a picture with a German Shepherd, and it went viral among friends, and friends' friends. Because my account is public, anyone can comment, and some random people started going into my post to leave negative comments about me and what I was doing.

"But those are the typical narrow-minded people. Anyway, a lot of them were fine with my actions once I explained that I am a vet,



Animal doctor Aishah with a feline patient. Staying true to a veterinarian's pledge, she treats all kinds of animals that need help. — MARISSA ZAHARA

while most customers are just amazed at such a young Malay vet."

For her, though, the hardest part of being a vet is bidding a permanent goodbye to incurable pets. "Euthanising pets is my greatest challenge, and I believe also for all vets. I don't think I will ever get past that stage where I will be all right when saying goodbye to an innocent and loving soul, but under our veterinary oath, anything that ends the suffering of the animals, we have to always suggest that. This is also part of our professionalism."

The young vet's most interesting case in her work so far had to do with a hippo! "It was during my placement in Zoo Negara. One day, the water bag of a pregnant hippo suddenly burst, and I was called to attend to the sudden birth of a baby hippo. As an intern, I didn't know what to do as I was still learning, so I mostly stood aside and observed the entire process. It was definitely a very tense situation, but still the most interesting nonetheless."

Whether it is treating cats, dogs or hippos in need, let's hope that such a committed animal lover will not be daunted by the obstacles in her path but will be able to power through all of them.