

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Elizabeth Chosa

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Dr. Elizabeth Chosa was born and raised in Johnson City, TN, and decided to be a veterinarian at age three. She earned her undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia and her DVM from the University of Georgia. She then served on active duty in the U.S. Army Veterinary Corps for five years. Her first duty station was Fort Meade, MD, where she cared for working dogs in the military and federal agencies including the National Security Agency and Secret Service. She then cared for dolphins and sea lions with the Navy Marine Mammal Program before being honorably discharged in 2010.

Dr. Chosa moved to Brevard County, FL, and worked as an associate veterinarian before purchasing Courtenay Animal Hospital in March 2012. After 10 years of hospital ownership, Dr. Chosa sold her practice in 2022 to become a full-time mom and part-time veterinarian. She works as a relief veterinarian for GP and ER practices in both Florida and Michigan and provides mentorship in the veterinary community through DVMoms, a support group for veterinarians who are mothers.



After the veterinary community lost multiple colleagues to suicide in quick succession, she cofounded the Veterinary Hope Foundation (VHF) with Dr. Blair McConnel in 2021, a 501(c)(3) organization which offers free support groups for the animal care community and focuses on education and connection to help protect the mental health of veterinarians and support staff.

“After researching existing programs, we realized that most available resources were directed toward veterinarians in crisis,” Dr. Chosa says of the founding. “We wondered if there might be a way to support veterinarians before they reached a crisis state. As veterinarians, we know how important preventive care is for physical health, and we started contemplating what preventive care might look like for mental health. We formed a small board of concerned veterinarians and partnered with mental health professionals who had experience working with animal care teams. We conducted market research with our colleagues, first informally and later formally, to determine what resources were needed most.”

Through the focus groups, they learned the majority of veterinarians are struggling with the same challenges, and that many of them feel isolated and are longing for community. These veterinarians are often introverts who are emotionally exhausted from their jobs and do not have the time and energy to form strong personal connections.

“We knew that by offering support groups led by mental health professionals we could achieve two goals: provide educational resources to help address common challenges while also building relationships and lasting community. We hosted our first three pilot groups in the fall of 2021, and many of those participants are still in touch! They have continued to provide support to one another in all aspects of life, long after the formal sessions ended.”

From the beginning, we said that if we could help even one veterinarian feel less alone in the world, it would be worth it.

- DR. ELIZABETH CHOSA



Dr. Chosa says that the value of these relationships is difficult to measure quantitatively, but having someone who really understands and supports you makes a huge difference in quality of life. Isolation is a known risk factor for mental health crises, so staying engaged and connected to others can be protective for mental health. VHF has been able to help more than 100 veterinarians and offers support groups for all members of the animal care team. They have 10 licensed mental health professionals, with extensive experience in the animal care community, serving as facilitators. These facilitators also complete specialized training through VHF to lead these groups. Currently, VHF offers three groups per month, but thanks to industry sponsors, they are poised to offer more.

Each support group meets once a week for six weeks with sessions lasting 60-75 minutes. These online meetings are held after hours to make them as accessible as possible for participants. The needs of the individual group members guide the meetings, but each week has a different topic of discussion with a curriculum based on market research. VHF has held specialized groups for veterinarians working in certain sectors of the profession and in specific roles within hospitals, but all groups discuss topics such as healthy boundaries, conflict resolution, self-compassion, imposter syndrome, and work/life integration.

As a practice owner, Dr. Chosa's focus was ensuring that all her patients received the highest possible level of medical care in a nurturing environment, emphasizing preventive care and maintaining wellness as the best way to keep patients healthy and happy. As a founder of VHF, her goals for veterinary professionals are the same – ensuring that veterinarians and their staff members have access to preventive care for their mental health in a caring community that helps maintain their wellness. VHF continues to grow and is ready to reach more veterinarians and staff to make a larger positive impact on the profession as a whole.

“I still love my work as a clinician, but I also feel an obligation to give back to this amazing profession that has given me so much,” Dr. Chosa says. “The VHF is the best way I know how to bring light into a profession that sometimes feels dark. I firmly believe that if we can build community and encourage veterinary professionals to take of themselves and each other with the same compassion they’ve always had for their patients, we can make a lasting difference.”

To learn more about VHF, visit www.veterinaryhope.org

A COMMUNITY of support IS WAITING!



Guided discussions with rotating topics of conversation carefully chosen to reflect the needs of practitioners.



A place to share thoughts and perspectives and hear the thoughts and perspectives of others.



A close community of acceptance, respect, and support of one another's individuality and concerns.

