

University of Prince Edward Island

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine
Summary of Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Supporting early-career veterinarian well-being through positive psychology and participatory action research

This thesis examines veterinary well-being during the transition from veterinary student to early-career practitioner, with particular attention to positive psychological well-being, meaningful work, and educational preparedness. The opening chapter reviews the literature on veterinary mental health and well-being, emphasizing the demanding nature of veterinary practice and the challenges associated with the transition from student to practitioner. Positive psychology serves as the guiding framework for the thesis, using both quantitative and qualitative methods to explore it. The quantitative component presents a national longitudinal study of Canadian veterinary graduates from the classes of 2022 and 2023 followed from graduation through the first 24 months of clinical practice. Eudaimonic well-being was assessed using Ryff's Psychological Well-Being framework, hedonic well-being using the Satisfaction with Life Scale, and resilience using the Connor–Davidson Resilience Scale. Linear mixed-effects models indicated relative stability in psychological well-being and life satisfaction over time. Mental health condition status, relationship status, and time spent outdoors were consistently associated with well-being outcomes. Both forms of well-being showed strong positive associations with resilience. Qualitative chapters explore how early-career veterinarians understand meaningful work and reflect on their preparedness for practice. Hermeneutic phenomenological interviews describe meaningful work as emerging through connection, making a difference, creativity, and problem-solving. Reflections on veterinary education highlight communication, confidence, perfectionism, and navigating the emotional and ethical realities of clinical practice. The final chapters describe the participatory development and mixed-methods evaluation of a veterinary well-being intervention using vignette-based reflection paired with cognitive behavioral therapy–informed worksheets. Evaluation findings identify collaborative learning, reflective dialogue, and values-based discussion as mechanisms that support psychological awareness and professional development among veterinary students. This thesis advances understanding of how well-being, meaning-making, and educational experiences shape the early-career transition in veterinary medicine and identifies practical pathways for strengthening veterinary education and support systems for emerging professionals.

Publications

Morabito, E., Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Orendain Pelka, C., Cake, M., Stacey, A. and Ritter, C. (2026) "Wow, I Get It Now." Early-Career Veterinarians' Perspectives on Their Educational Experiences and Perceived Impacts on Well-Being. *J Vet Med Educ.* 2026 Jan 21:e20250050. doi: 10.3138/jvme-2025-0050.

Kittisiam T, Ritter C, Morabito E, Stacey A, Khosa D, Jones A. Improved mental health, social support, and time outdoors are associated with higher emotional intelligence in early-career veterinarians: a longitudinal study. *J Am Vet Med Assoc.* 2026 Jan 21:1-8. doi: 10.2460/javma.25.09.0630. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41564545.

Kittisiam T, Ritter C, Morabito E, Gillis D, Stacey A, Khosa D, Jones A. (2025) Thriving or surviving? A latent profile analysis of resilience, psychological wellbeing and professional quality of life in early-career veterinarians in Canada. *Vet Rec.* 2025 Dec 3. doi: 10.1002/vetr.70059. Epub ahead of print. PMID: 41332293.

Morabito, E., Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Cake, M. and Ritter, C. (2025). "This is my why." Exploring the concept of meaningful work in early-career veterinarians across Canada. *Frontiers in Veterinary Science*, 12, p.1595949.

Kittisiam, T., Ritter, C., Morabito, E., Stacey, A., Khosa, D. and Jones, A. (2025). A qualitative exploration of the emotional experiences and applications of emotional intelligence in early-career veterinarians. *Veterinary Record*, p.e5599.

Presentations

Morabito, E.*, Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Cake, M. A., & Ritter, C. (2025). "This is my why": Exploring meaningful work and well-being in early-career veterinarians. International Society for Anthrozoology (ISAZ) Conference, June 19–22, 2025, Saskatoon, SK, Canada. (Oral presentation)

Morabito, E.*, Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Stacey, A., & Ritter, C. (2025). Creating knowledge together: Co-developing a veterinary well-being intervention through participatory action research. Canadian Association of Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (CAVEPM) Conference, June 9–10, 2025, Calgary, AB, Canada. (Oral presentation)

Morabito, E.*, Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Stacey, A., VanLeeuwen, J., Gunn McQuillan, H., & Ritter, C. (2024). Uncovering the complex tapestry of meaningful work in early-career veterinarians across Canada. International Society for Anthrozoology Conference, June 27–30, 2024, Hartpury, United Kingdom. (Oral presentation)

Morabito, E.*, Jones-Bitton, A., Kittisiam, T., Stacey, A., VanLeeuwen, J., Gunn McQuillan, H., & Ritter, C. (2023). Understanding meaningful work: Conversations with veterinarians across Canada. Canadian Association of Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine Conference, May 2023, Guelph, ON, Canada. (Poster presentation)

Morabito, E.*, Jones, A., Kittisiam, T., Stacey, A., VanLeeuwen, J., Gunn McQuillan, H., & Ritter, C. (2022). Quantitative assessment of eudaimonia and hedonia as protective factors on veterinary mental health in a longitudinal Canada-wide study. International Symposium on Veterinary Epidemiology and Economics (ISVEE), August 7–12, 2022, Halifax, NS, Canada. (Oral presentation)
Biographical Data

Awards

SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship (2024–2026)

Zoetis Graduate Student Research Award (2024)

Lévesque Graduate Fellowship in Human Health & Mental Health (2023)

Student Oral Presentation Award – Canadian Association of Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine (2025)

Biographical

Born in New York, New York