

IT was the last day before the veterinary clinic closed for a week for Chinese New Year. I had to go there so that my dog could have an X-ray. Alone, I struggled to find a parking space and envied others who had drivers to drop them off at the front door of the clinic. Balancing my very ill dog in one hand, my bag and the umbrella in another, I crossed the road in the pouring rain, cursing our lot all the way.

Once inside, as the X-ray was being prepared, the vet spoke softly to my dog, as though talking to a child, while I was instructed to keep her still. When the vet needed to show me the results in another room, a nurse came forward to calm my frightened dog and keep her company. Her voice was tender when she said: "Don't worry. Mummy isn't far. I'm here. You won't be alone."

I'm reminded of the personable nature of this vet and the kindness of his employees during a very hard time on this day which marks World Veterinary Day.

PASSION TO CARE

There are many hazards to being a veterinary surgeon, shares Dr Clement Anthony, a veteran in the field, during a recent chat about life as a vet. "For one, your patient is capable of biting you!" he says, chuckling.

Soon, his Rottweiler, Bruno, ambles over, finds a spot near my feet and settles down. When the dog starts to snore softly, Clement adds that a vet must have a passion to care for animals and plenty of patience before proceeding to share his story.

By his own admission, Clement says that his parents wanted him to pursue a career as a lawyer, doctor or engineer. But he knew he wanted to be a veterinarian from a very young age. In fact, a defining moment for Clement was when the family's first dog, Caesar, died.

"He came and slept at the dining area where I usually study," recalls the 60-year-old. "He stayed close to me and when I finished studying, I asked Mum if we should send him outside for the night. She said to leave it and allowed him to stay where he was. The next morning, we found him dead at the very place he'd sat, beside me." From that moment on, he knew that he wanted to become a vet.

OVER AND ABOVE

The Rottweiler awakens from his slumber and demands Clement's attention. This

DOCTOR TO THE FOUR-LEGGED

A passion to care deeply for animals and a personable nature are just some of the qualities of a veterinary surgeon, writes **Aneeta Sundararaj**

vet, with more than 30 years of experience running his practice in KL's Taman Tun Dr Ismail, attends to his dog's needs and apologises for interrupting the discussion. Once the dog settles down, Clement explains how veterinary sciences has developed.

Like modern medicine for humans, veterinary sciences too has many disciplines. Indeed, many of the procedures carried out for humans were first perfected on animals. Still, when it comes to specialised treatment, the onus about whether or not to proceed rests with the pet owner.

That was precisely the case when a dog that Clement treated was referred to an oncologist to treat a brain tumour. They were told that there was very little that Malaysian vets could do to help the dog. They decided to engage the services of a veterinary surgeon from the Netherlands who performed surgery on the dog. The owners felt that the costs

involved, which reached some RM25,000 was worth the effort. The dog is still alive today.

The desire to go over and above what's

necessary for a pet is something that many devoted pet owners will understand. In Lee Pei Lynn's case, the stars must have shone down on a stray, super-scrawny starving kitten when she chanced upon it several years ago. She decided to adopt the kitten, which she named Ollie.

She says: "I've watched her blossom into a self-assured and strong cat; even her limp has disappeared thanks to regular physical exercise. She vocalises a lot and I've picked up a wide range of cat vocabulary from her. She's even learnt to travel in the car with me."

Ollie, says Pei Lynn, is comfortable perching on her shoulder, licking her every once in a while for additional assurance.

FRUSTRATING PRACTICE

In spite of the many joys that Clement derives from his profession, he laments some of the lack of support it receives, namely, restrictions placed on access to medication that's tailored for pets and support from organisations like the Pharmacy Board and Veterinary Department. Still, he's enormously grateful for his team of support workers.

One such person is Anelyn Banaban Torrecampo. As a veterinary nurse, this 45-year-old says that other than managing the administration of a clinic, her task can include training other workers and supporting the vet when he carries out procedures such as endoscopy, dentistry and surgery.

Tears roll down her eyes when she shares the story of a dog called Spike whom she treated for oral cancer. He was hospitalised for a month. "It was very difficult," she recalls, "especially when it came to administering medication. But I loved him so much, even though he bit me many times. I took care of him until the owner decided that it was time to let him go."

Sensing her sorrow, Bruno gets to his feet and nuzzles Anelyn's knee, offering comfort.

Ultimately, the lasting thought from this discussion about the veterinary profession and what it entails can be encapsulated in a very simple statement that Clement alludes to: "It's a beautiful thing when a career and a passion come together."



Dr Clement Anthony aspired to work with animals from a young age.



Anelyn Torrecampo with Bruno.



"I've picked up a wide range of cat vocabulary from her."

Lee Pei Lynn, seen here with Ollie the cat