

A portrait of Dr. Sonja Olson, DVM, a woman with dark, wavy hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a dark grey, textured turtleneck sweater and a black leather belt. A necklace with a red and white pendant is visible. Her hands are on her hips.

DR. SONJA OLSON, DVM
Heartstorming Wellness

HEALING THE HEALERS

One out of 6 veterinarians has considered suicide, according to studies from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Female veterinarians are 2.4 times more likely to die in this manner than the general population, and 80% of vets are women.

I found this information on NPR.org after chatting with Dr. Sonja Olson for the first time last year, when she and I were chatting about her new book and business venture. She talked with me about the high burn out rate and mental health issues that are

burn out rate and mental health issues that are prevalent in the veterinary world. I was shocked by this information (and my own ignorance).

As an emergency vet, Sonja knew all too well the stresses that were part of the profession.

"I have several decades of having a lived experience as an emergency veterinarian, as team leader, and as a compassionate teacher inside and outside of the veterinary environment. I have

navigated compassion fatigue, burnout, collective and cumulative trauma, and along the way have (and continue to) learn approaches and strategies that complement what one needs to do for themselves and perhaps with other health professionals to thrive and flourish." Dr. Olson said.

This brings her to her new journey as an author, speaker, and "healer of the healers" on her newly launched wellness platform.

In March 2022, Dr. Sonja wrote and published her first book (*Creating Wellbeing and Building Resilience in the Veterinary Profession: A Call to Life*), which focused on the caregiving challenges for veterinary professionals over the last 2 years. She is currently working on the proposal now for the complimentary workbook. Dr. Sonja credits "the creative and collaborative energy that was fostered in this process as well as my current full-time role alongside veterinary social workers that sparked my desire to connect with other like-minded souls globally." Authentic, meaningful, and efficient strategies to decrease suffering and support collective healing are needed, she added. "We need to take a stand for what we believe in, find our people, and be courageously creative. In order to do so, we need to be fortified as individuals and in the spaces that we live in."

Dr. Olson's full-time role currently is Veterinary Wellness Educator for the BluePearl Health & Well-being Team, working alongside licensed mental health professionals. The team has had the opportunity to create initiatives and resources as well as facilitate discussions on well-being concepts that foster a more compassionate, healthy caregiving community and culture. Both in her BluePearl role and outside of work, she seeks to support veterinary associates more globally through podcasts, writing, speaking virtually and in person to veterinary colleagues, and creatively collaborating with other like-minded souls. Dr. Olson founded her wellness platform, Heartstorming Wellness in 2022 to support these well-being endeavors (www.heartstorming.co).

But even with all she has accomplished, Dr. Olson wasn't immune to the imposter syndrome that plagues many of us when starting out with an idea we have. She advises, "When your self-confidence wavers, find those around you who believe in you and the change that you can influence, even when you struggle to see and walk the path forward. Trust yourself. Trust your capabilities. Connect to





"My 1:1 "heartstorming sessions" are where meaningful connection and dialogue take place. Through a series of conversations, I explore what are the current challenges and related opportunities where together we can bring forth the innate wisdom and strength of the individual combined with new, relevant skills/approaches."

your 'why' and what matters most to you and you will find the courage to be your authentic awesome self to contribute in ways that you may know and some that you may not have imagined!

Take the time to be clear on what is deeply meaningful to you and your top values. These will fortify you when you get anxious, fearful, and tired. Know that you uniquely matter and trust that the way that you will contribute will make itself clear with patience and time. So, keep an open, curious mindset, and an open heart, and have the courage to lean into your power!"

As for what's on the horizon next for Dr. Olson, she says, "Global collaboration with other holistic wellness practitioners, particularly those supporting human and veterinary medical caregivers. There is so much healing that is needed and innovation demanded to support a One Health approach to a sustainably healthy planet."


In addition, she is very open and interested in finding collaborative, energizing spaces for conversation and learning. "There is so much uplifting energy and hope that we can give one another, regardless of our unique callings. Stay humbly confident, courageous, and connected, friends!"

Connect with Dr. Sonja Olson

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