Why did you want to be a veterinarian?
I don’t think I could give an accurate answer anymore to why I became a veterinarian. Honestly, I wanted to be an actress! My mother tricked me into getting a bachelors in biology, during which time my interest refocused on science. Even at the conclusion of my BS, though, I thought I couldn’t become a veterinarian. My perception was that I would not be strong enough to deal with the euthanasia and other loss. Then, after I graduated college, while I was waiting for interviews for an entry level job in environmental remediation, I started doing animal rescue. After several months (government jobs are slow to come by) and losing several fosters to disease, I realized I was already dealing with the loss and yet continuing to accept more fosters. At that point, I rethought the ‘can’t do’ judgment and decided to apply to vet school.

Why choose internal medicine?
After vet school, I became a GP. When I started in general practice, my area of interest was soft tissue surgery. Over time, though, I came to realize that, although surgery was fun, the most rewarding thing in my day was putting the pieces together to solve medical puzzles. These days, given my sub-focuses in minimally-invasive procedures and hepatic/pancreatic disease, I get to use both skill sets. In this vein, one of my current clinical interests is optimizing minimally-invasive techniques to treat, and hopefully cure, benign renal hematuria. I absolutely love thinking outside the box and channeling my inner MacGyver to help patients!

What do you enjoy about UTCVM?
The best thing about UTCVM is the strong culture of collaboration to solve puzzles. Faculty work together to give students a strong medical foundation (James Herriot would stand no chance of meeting current knowledge base expectations for GPs!) and equip them to be lifelong learners. Students, house officers, and faculty collaborate on research through the summer COE program to solve scientific puzzles. Best of all, students, house officers, faculty, and GPs come together to solve patient puzzles and, thus, save lives as a team!

What do you enjoy about teaching?
My favorite part of teaching is helping a student transition from being a passive vessel for knowledge into a critical thinker and learner. I learned this skill from an amazing, highly gifted (and a little bit scary!) criticalist named Janet Aldrich. Every medical success I have, every research question I answer – I partially owe to her mentorship.

What role do you play in RDVM practices?
My role is to act as a complement to the excellent case management provided by referring veterinarians. Having lived in a number of places, I can say with confidence that UT is privileged to serve incredibly talented general practice veterinarians. It is incredibly rare for a day on clinics to go by without me being moved to point out a particularly insightful diagnostic work-up by a GP. Commonly, my role is just to execute their next tier of diagnostics, thanks to UT’s cutting edge ‘whiz bang’ gadgetry.

I think that being the best veterinarian possible requires being more than a vet. So often, the game-changing move in a case is made due to insight brought in from our ‘outside lives.’ Mine includes leading construction crews for Habitat for Humanity, backpacking, swing dancing, and playing with the world’s cutest baby (isn’t every baby the cutest?). I love using the perspective gained from these activities to help find the least invasive way to get to the truth and/or help a critter!

Dr. Whittemore has also invented a life-like canine mannikin to teach flexible upper gastrointestinal endoscopy to veterinarians (see photo at left). The market version of her invention, Michael Angelo (Mikey) K9 Endoscopy Mannikin, has just become available for purchase. More information on Mikey can be found at www.rescuecritters.com.

Learn more about Dr. Whittemore and find a link to her SelectedWorks by visiting https://vetmed.tennessee.edu/home/Pages/faculty_staff_details.aspx?NetID=jwhittem