

In recent years, the profession of veterinary medicine has become more sophisticated and complex. The public expects state-of-the-art veterinary care for its animals. To provide high quality service, today's veterinarians utilize the skills of trained professionals known as *veterinary technicians*.

If you care about animals, enjoy working with your hands, are good at basic math and decision-making, like working with people and handling a variety of responsibilities, then the challenging career of veterinary technology may be just right for you.

Duties and Responsibilities

The veterinary technician is an integral member of the veterinary health care team who has been educated in the care and handling of animals, the basic principles of normal and abnormal life processes, and in routine laboratory and clinical procedures. Veterinary technicians work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. While a veterinary technician can assist in performing a wide variety of tasks, they cannot diagnose, prescribe, perform surgery, or engage in any activity prohibited by a state's practice act.

In Private Practice

A veterinary technician employed in a veterinary clinic or hospital handles many of the same responsibilities that nurses and other professionals perform for physicians. They are trained to:

- Obtain and record patient case histories
- Collect specimens and perform laboratory procedures
- Provide specialized nursing care
- Prepare animals, instruments, and equipment for surgery
- Assist in diagnostic, medical, and surgical procedures
- Expose and develop radiographs
- Advise and educate animal owners
- Supervise and train practice personnel
- Perform dental prophylaxes

In Biomedical Research

In addition to private practice responsibilities, veterinary technicians employed in a biomedical research facility perform other duties under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian, a biomedical research worker, or other scientist:

- Supervise the humane care and handling of research animals
- Assist in the implementation of research projects

Career Opportunities

While the majority of veterinary technicians are employed in private practice, the demand for technicians is rapidly expanding to include new employment opportunities in both human and animal health-related fields such as:

- Biomedical research
- Diagnostic laboratories
- Colleges/Universities
- Veterinary supply sales
- Zoos and wildlife facilities
- Humane societies and animal control facilities
- Military service
- Drug and feed manufacturing companies
- Food safety inspection



photo courtesy of Shedd Aquarium, Chicago, IL.

Education

Students interested in a career in veterinary technology should have an aptitude for general science, math, and biology and demonstrate basic language and communication skills.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredits veterinary technician programs throughout the United States. Most AVMA-accredited programs lead to an associate degree after two years but some lead to a four-year baccalaureate degree. Students earning a baccalaureate degree usually receive higher salaries and greater level of job responsibilities.

A period of clinical experience in a veterinary practice is required for all students in an AVMA-accredited veterinary technology program. This period of hands-on training is called a preceptorship, practicum, internship or externship, and is a critical component of the veterinary technician program.

Distance Learning

To accommodate work and family obligations, distance learning is an option for many students wishing to earn a veterinary technician degree from home. The AVMA accredits several distance-learning courses that meet the same Standards of Accreditation as traditional programs and include a clinical component. Students fulfill the clinical training through sponsorship by a licensed veterinarian.



Salary

Veterinary technicians earn salaries that compare favorably to those in other fields requiring a similar education. Salaries vary according to experience, responsibility, geographic location, and employment type.

Professional Regulation

The majority of states have regulations that provide for technician credentialing (certification, licensure, or registration). Candidates are typically tested for competency through an examination regulated by the state board of veterinary medical examiners. Most states require candidates to pass the Veterinary Technician National Examination before being issued a license to practice.

Veterinary Technician Specialties

Some veterinary technicians decide to focus on areas of specialization. There are currently four specialty academies and two societies. A "Society" is defined as a group of individuals, veterinary technicians, hospital staff, and veterinarians interested in a specific discipline or area of veterinary medicine. An "Academy" is the term selected by the NAVTA to designate a group receiving recognition as a specialty. Current specialty groups are:

- Academy of Veterinary Emergency Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT) www.avecct.org
- Academy of Veterinary Technician Anesthetists (AVTA) www.avta-vts.org
- Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT) www.avdt.us
- Academy of Internal Medicine for Veterinary Technicians www.aimvt.com
- American Association of Equine Veterinary Technicians www.aaevt.org
- Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians www.svbt.org

Veterinary Technician Associations

About 100 state, local, and provincial organizations of veterinary technicians exist across the United States and Canada. The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) offers members continuing education, social, and employment-related activities to assist in their professional growth. For specifics on Canadian veterinary technology programs, contact the Canadian Association of Animal Health Technicians (see box "For More Information").

The challenging career of veterinary technology may be just right if you:

- care about animals
- enjoy working with your hands
- possess good basic math skills
- are good at decision-making
- like working with people
- like handling a variety of responsibilities

The *demand*
for technicians
is *rapidly* expanding . . .

look for an AVMA-accredited program near you.

For More Information

- Complete listing of AVMA-accredited veterinary technician programs
www.avma.org
- National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA)
50 S. Pickett, #110, Alexandria, VA 22304
www.navta.net
- Canadian Association of Animal Health Technologists and Technicians (CAAHTT)
Box 595, Langham, SK S0K 2L0, CANADA
www.caahtt-acttsa.com



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A Career in Veterinary Technology



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