

The Veterinary Health Care Team

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Every veterinary hospital staff consists of a team of caring individuals, each contributing his or her unique abilities to ensure high quality medical care for animals and professional treatment of the owners. Depending upon the size of the hospital, the team may have anywhere from three to thirty members but, regardless of size, dedication to service remains a top priority.

The Veterinarian – Leading the Team

Veterinarians are doctors trained to protect the health of both animals and people. They have received a minimum of six years of education and are licensed to practice by the state where they are located. In a clinical hospital environment, veterinarians work with large and small animals to diagnose illness, prescribe medication, and perform surgery. Like physicians, some veterinarians specialize in areas such as surgery, internal medicine, or dentistry.

In addition to opportunities in clinical practice, veterinarians may choose to work in zoos, wildlife parks, or aquariums. Other veterinarians focus on human disease in public health, regulatory medicine, or research. Personal attributes that contribute to a successful career as a veterinarian in clinical practice include the ability to work well with animals and their owners, basic business and management training, and organizational skills.

The Veterinary Technician

Veterinary technicians perform valuable medical and non-medical services in clinical practice. They are graduates of an AVMA-accredited program in veterinary technology usually leading to an Associate or Bachelor degree. The veterinary technician is educated and trained to support the veterinarian in surgical assisting, laboratory procedures, radiography, anesthesiology, prescribed treatment and nursing, and client education. Almost every state requires a veterinary technician to pass a credentialing exam to ensure a high level of competency.

Some veterinary technicians pursue specialties in emergency and critical care, anesthesiology, or dentistry. Personal attributes that contribute to a successful career as a veterinary technician in clinical practice include a strong science background, ability to work well with people and animals, and good communication and decision-making skills.

The Veterinary Hospital Manager

Most large veterinary hospitals find that having a hospital (or practice) manager greatly improves the team's efficiency. This person is responsible for the business functions of the practice. Depending upon the size and type of hospital, the manager's duties could include personnel hiring and supervision, budget and inventory management, accounting, marketing, and designing service protocols. A strong business background, computer knowledge, and desire to work with people are key attributes for success as a hospital manager.

The Veterinary Assistant

In some hospitals, a veterinary assistant supports the veterinarian and/or the veterinary technician in their daily tasks. The assistant may be asked to perform kennel work, assist in the restraint and handling of animals, feed and exercise the animals, and spend time on clerical duties. There is no credentialing exam for the veterinary assistant; however, training programs are available (see www.navta.net). The ability to follow directions, listen and communicate efficiently, and handle multiple assignments are skills that a veterinary assistant should demonstrate.

The Receptionist

The receptionist or client service representative is usually the first person to welcome a client into the hospital. The first impression he or she creates with a new client will determine how the client perceives the quality of medical services being offered. A good receptionist must have excellent communication skills and be able to handle a variety of questions and requests from clients and the public. In addition to setting appointments, responding to inquiries about hospital services, greeting clients, and managing callbacks, a receptionist may also perform accounting, marketing, or client counseling duties. A customer service attitude, the ability to manage multiple tasks, and professionalism under stress are important attributes for a hospital receptionist.

Other Team Members

The hospital team may also include an adoption counselor, a grief counselor, administrative assistant, kennel worker, and part-time volunteers. Everyone has an important role to play in assuring the health and well-being of the hospital's patients and the owners who care for them.

Resources

American Veterinary Medical Association
www.avma.org

National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA)
P.O. Box 224, Battle Ground, IN 47920
www.navta.net

Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA)
48 Howard Street, Albany, NY 12207
(518) 433-8911
www.vhma.org