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Veterinary Technician Career, Job, and Training Information

Veterinary Technician and Technology Career and Job Highlights

- A State examination and completion of a 2- or 4-year veterinary technology program are required.
- Greater than average job growth is projected.
- Competition for jobs in zoos is expected to be high.
- Despite the physically draining and emotional demanding aspects of the job, animal lovers find much fulfillment through this profession.

Veterinary Technician and Technology Career Information and Job Description

Cutting-edge veterinary care has become the expected norm from animals' owners. Veterinary technologists and technicians do for the veterinarian many of the same things a nurse does for a doctor, such as regular laboratory work and clinical procedures. Though they differ in the amount and type of formal education, in practice technicians and technologists perform many of the same tasks, though actual job expectations depend entirely on the employer. The majority of workers in this profession are designated by the title of technicians.

Veterinary technologists and technicians in private practice usually do clinical work with direction from the veterinarian. They conduct tests and help diagnose and care for illnesses and injuries in animals. They also may help with conducting laboratory tests, taking blood, preparing tissue samples for testing, and performing urinalysis and blood counts. They often use medical equipment such as test tubes and laboratory machinery to carry out these tasks. Outside of the laboratory setting, technicians also take and develop x ray images, take medical histories, and care for animals under veterinary care. Technicians with experience advise pet owners regarding healthy practices and may train new hires at their clinic. Small-animal practitioners employ technicians to provide care for companion animals like cats, dogs, frogs, birds, cattle, pigs, sheep, and fish. Few technicians work in clinics where both small companion animals and big, nondomestic animals are cared for.

Veterinary technologists and technicians are also employed in research centers where they give medications orally and topically, record genealogical information, weigh animals, and document

pain and stress levels of research animals. They may also sterilize equipment and care for animals following operations. Veterinary technologists and technicians employed at research centers are supervised by doctors, lab technicians, and veterinarians. Arriving animals may be vaccinated by veterinary technologists and technicians; sick, injured, or otherwise unwanted animals may need to be euthanized or put down.

Some veterinary technologists and technicians help with research into cloning and gene therapy that is designed to ultimately assist humans. Most technicians have the ultimate goal of helping animals, but may find opportunities to do so in other fields, such as livestock management, the military wildlife medicine, pharmaceutical sales, and biomedical research.

Veterinary Technician Training and Job Qualifications

A 4-year program designed for veterinary technologists and a 2-year veterinary technician program are the typical levels of training required to enter this profession. The majority of entry-level technicians hold a 2-year associate degree from an approved junior college veterinary technology program in which they took classes and gained hands-on clinical experience with live animals. Four-year bachelor's degree programs are offered by some universities in veterinary technology; two-year programs in laboratory animal science are typically offered by the same college and universities that offer 4-year programs.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) accredited 80 veterinary technology programs in more than 40 States in 2003. Every state in the nation allows graduates from AVMA-approved programs to take the certification exam. Though each State requires different things from veterinary technologists and technicians, they all require passage of some kind of test following formal training, assuring animal owners that the technician has acquired at least a standard set of skills and knowledge. Technicians' competency is tested in practical, written, and oral sections of the test. State agencies regulate the certification programs, and some States defer regulation to the State Board of Veterinary Examiners. Three levels—certified, licensed, and registered—are available. The majority of States require the National Veterinary Technician (NVT) test. Technicians can transfer their test scores between States as long as the States use the same test.

Research facilities prefer candidates who are certified with the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS). The AALAS certifies technicians at three levels and focuses on three specific fields—animal health, facility administration and management, and animal husbandry and welfare. A combination of education and experience qualify candidate to take the certifying exam. Relevant work experience must have been gained in an approved laboratory animal facility caring for lab animals. Candidates with the proper amount of experience work towards the appropriate and desire level of certification. The highest level is Laboratory Animal Technologist (LATG); the middle level is Laboratory Animal Technician (LAT); the lowest level is Animal Laboratory Assistant Technician (ALAT). The multiple-choice exam grows longer and more difficult as the desired level of certification increases.

Taking the maximum possible number of high school math, biology, and science courses is recommended for persons interested in this field. Practical skills gained through postsecondary

science classes, preferably in a clinical setting, are also a huge asset. Given the interpersonal interaction of technician with pet owner, good communication skills should be developed. Close attention to detail, organization, and a team player attitude are all essential characteristics of veterinary technologists and technicians.

A veterinarian usually supervises newly hired technicians directly while they are trained on routine tasks. Shorter times of direct supervision are required of new hires with experience in clinical training and hands-on experience with laboratory equipment. Experienced veterinary technologists and technicians perform more and more complex tasks with only general veterinarian supervision, some eventually being promoted to supervisory roles.

Veterinary Technician Job and Employment Opportunities

A faster than average growth rate is projected for veterinary technologists and technicians through 2012. Zoo jobs for technicians will see the most competitive application process because of the sheer number of applicants for open positions, in addition to the slow projected expansion of personnel, low turnover rate, and relatively small number of positions available. As current technicians leave the profession permanently they will need to be replaced.

As pet owners become richer and richer they are more apt to pay for healthcare for their pets because they consider the animals part of their families. While the total number of dogs as pets is expected to grow more slowly than it has in the past, the number of cats is projected to increase greatly, spurring demand for feline care. Increased demand for specialty areas like surgical procedures and animal dental care are also expected to increase the overall demand for veterinary services. Veterinary technologists and technicians will also be able to find an increasing number of jobs in wildlife facilities, animal control facilities, humane societies, diagnostic laboratories, biomedical facilities, food safety inspection facilities, and drug manufacturing companies. Animal hospitals, kennels, and humane societies will seek to replace untrained assistants with certified technicians, spurring even more demand for veterinary technologists and technicians.

Economic recessions affect veterinary technician employment relatively little. Because animals require medical care regardless of the condition of the economy, the profession experiences relatively few layoffs during hard times.