

# Veterinary Assistant: Full & Part-Time Position

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The responsibilities of veterinary assistants vary considerably. Typically they will divide their time between assisting the receptionists, helping doctors with physical examinations, dispensing medications, and helping veterinary technicians position patients for and process radiographs, prepare patients for surgery, provide nursing and comfort care, and perform treatments or basic laboratory diagnostic tests.

Veterinary assistants must build positive, professional relationships with clients and staff members. Assistants must have, at a minimum, their high school diplomas and must pursue significant on-the-job training.

## Pay

Assistants vary in pay based on education, experience, skill sets, and responsibilities. Assistants are often people considering or currently involved in earning more advanced degrees or certifications within the veterinary industry (for instance, becoming a certified veterinary technician or working on their undergraduate degree prior to entering veterinary school). Typical starting wages for an assistant are \$9-11/hour. Hours can vary, but most assistants work 30-40 hours per week. Assistants who earn additional responsibilities can receive additional hours.

## Qualifications

- Possess a High School Diploma, G.E.D., or better
- Applicants with a certification in veterinary assistantship are preferred
- Be able to lift and carry at least 50 pounds
- Must be at least 18 years of age (to assist with X-ray)
- Compassion for and the desire to work with animals
- Proficiency with speaking and writing in the English language (Spanish-bilingual preferred)
- A positive attitude, follow-through, and excellent communication and teamwork skills
- Punctuality and reliability are mandatory
- While not required, it is suggested that anyone working directly with animals consult their medical professional about rabies vaccines and other potential safeguards.

## Training

A training schedule will be provided to help make the following list less overwhelming. Many of the tasks require prior training or education in order to perform. However, some are ones that require repetition to master and/or may be somewhat different from training due to our high standards and carefully thought out procedures. During the first week of employment, an assistant will be provided training hours for shadowing staff to learn the job. Fellow assistants, the medical staff, and management will serve as mentors in order to help a new assistant during their first few months. Assistants should be proficient at most, if not all, of the following tasks at the end of the first three months.

Some additional training is required of medical staff including, but not limited to, Hill's Veterinary Nutritional Advocate training, safety training, and emergency training.

## General Knowledge and Tasks

*General Knowledge*

- Give directions to the practice.
- Know the range of services the practice provides and the species it treats.
- Be reasonably familiar with breeds and coat colors.
- Follow OSHA standards. Be able to find Material Safety Data Sheets quickly.
- Know and use standard medical and business abbreviations.
- Use proper medical terminology when speaking and writing.
- Understand the life cycle and pathology of common parasites (intestinal parasites, heartworms, fleas, ticks), and know the names of most common preventatives, recommended treatments, and diagnostics.
- Be familiar with zoonotic (contagious) diseases, including their prevention and steps to reduce or eliminate transmission.
- Know the policies regarding provision of veterinary care, treatment of stray animals, deposits for hospitalized patients, payments, credit, pet health insurance, and finance fees.
- Competently speak and write the English language.
- Competently speak a second language commonly used at the practice (Spanish)

### *General Tasks*

- Always be in position and prepared to work by the start of each scheduled shift.
- Maintain accurate personal time cards.
- Enter/exit the practice through the front door so that you see what clients see during business hours. Routinely pick up trash or feces from the parking lot, sidewalks, or entryway.
- Enter/exit the practice through the back door. Routinely pick up trash or feces from the parking lot, sidewalks, or entryway. Leave in groups to ensure safety.
- Park in the assigned staff area behind the hospital.
- Maintain a professional appearance while at work, including clean and pressed uniforms or clothes. Change clothes daily as necessary to look professional and avoid carrying odors. Abide by the company dress code.
- Smile and maintain an even, friendly demeanor while on the job.
- Perform job tasks efficiently without rushing.
- Promote a positive attitude among staff.
- Handle stress and pressure with poise and tact.
- Be willing and available to stay late or through breaks, when needed, to assist with emergency or critical-care patients.
- Show respect for clients, team members, and animals (alive or deceased) at all times.
- Effectively promote preventive health care, nutrition, and wellness plans to clients. Support what fellow staff members have said to clients.
- Have the physical strength and ability to stand for an entire shift when needed, and be able to lift pets and objects weighing up to 50 pounds without assistance. Assist in lifting patients weighing more than 50 pounds.
- Maintain a list of tasks and engage in productive work during slow periods.
- Assist other employees as needed. Avoid waiting for coworkers to ask for assistance.
- Stock hospital supplies and pharmaceutical, pet-food, and over-the-counter products.
- Ensure that medical supplies are always available. Add new items to the list of depleted supplies.
- Regularly check for outdated supplies. Remove and replace them as directed by the office manager.
- Assist in hiring new assistants by advising candidates of openings, offering them applications, working with them to help evaluate their personalities and skill levels, and providing your opinion to the hiring manager.
- Participate in your performance appraisal, and, as requested, in those of others.
- Participate in all staff and training meetings including the mandatory monthly staff meeting.

- Maintain constant vigilance regarding open doorways that could allow pets to escape from the facility.
- Maintain strict confidentiality regarding clients and patients for whom the practice provides veterinary services.
- Be prepared to handle any pet or facility emergency that may arise, including dog or cat fights, choking or strangulating animals, and facility fire or weather-related emergencies. Follow contingency plans.
- Follow established closing procedures to ensure the security of patients, staff, data, revenue, inventory, and the facility.

### **Front-Office Tasks**

- Know phone functions, including hold, intercom, transfer, forward, and three-way calling.
- Answer the phone by the third ring when receptionists are preoccupied or unavailable.
- Assist receptionists in keeping the facility's reception area and room(s) clean and tidy. Replace older issues of magazines with current ones, placed neatly in holders or on tables.
- When assisting at the reception desk, know names of clients and patients that are scheduled to arrive before they appear.
- Access client information within the practice-management software system. Enter and retrieve client and patient data in the computer.
- Assist receptionists with clients' payments, and provide clients with receipts that detail their transactions.

### **Client-Interaction Tasks**

#### *Patient-Admittance Tasks*

- Cordially greet incoming clients and patients, addressing each by name.
- Check clients in. Update clients' or patients' records as needed.
- Use clients' and patients' names during conversations.
- Counsel clients on financial and admittance policies, their pets' medical procedures, and options that require consideration. Answer clients' questions and ensure that all admittance paperwork is properly completed. Check that clients' signatures on consent forms match those on new client information sheets.
- Advise clients of special call-in times to check on patients or speak with doctors.
- Inform clients of recommended services for their pets and/or special health care programs offered by the practice such as Wellness Plans and the Monthly Auto Shipment program for preventatives.
- Provide clients with accurate and thorough information about over-the-counter products. Understand and explain internal and external parasite products as well as diets, dental products, and behavior management tools.
- Know where brochures and client-education materials are stored. Provide clients with handouts and brochures regarding relevant medical conditions, surgeries, immunizations, internal and external parasites, pet insurance, and diets.
- Give estimates for services to be performed on patients.
- Advise clients of significant changes in policies or services since their last visit.
- Explain delays that affect clients. Ensure the comfort of clients and patients during their waits. Offer water to clients or patients in need (or withhold water from patients as appropriate). Reschedule appointments as needed.
- Call for waiting clients using pets' names and clients' last names. Lead them to exam rooms.
- Transfer incoming patients to appropriate wards and ensure the comfort of clients and patients. Identify patients with cage cards and/or neck bands. Add patients to each day's census, procedure list, or surgery schedule.

- Assist clients with unruly or unrestrained pets. When assisting receptionists, ensure that all dogs are leashed immediately after arrival and that cats and smaller pets are caged. Isolate aggressive pets. Request assistance if needed.

### *Pet-Identification Tasks*

- Scan new patients and strays for microchips, tags, and tattoos. Identify and record microchip numbers, tattoos, and/or patient markings in patients' records.
- Communicate with clients about the various pet-identification systems available, including tags, tattoos, and microchips.
- Assist clients in registering pet-identification information in the practice's computer system and in the appropriate national database.

### *Patient-Discharge Tasks*

- Coordinate patient transfers with front desk, kennel and/or veterinarians.
- Prepare medications and prescriptions for dispensing as directed by the doctor. Ensure that each prescription label contains the following information: doctor's name; practice's name, address, and phone number including area code; date; patient's and client's name; medication name, strength and volume (or number); administration instructions including route of administration, such as by mouth or in the ear; and product's expiration date. Initial top right corner of label to indicate your approval.
- Dispense medications. Discuss administration or application of products and potential side effects with owners as instructed by doctors or technicians.
- Provide clients with accurate and thorough information about all over-the-counter products. Understand and explain internal- and external-parasite products as well as diets, dental products, and behavior management tools.
- Accurately invoice clients from charges based on the estimate prepared for them, services performed, and items used/sold. Include relevant discounts when applicable.
- Discharge patients. Instruct clients on the care of patients at home, timing of recheck appointments, and potential adverse effects of surgeries, procedures, or medications.
- Assist grieving clients and comfort them. Be familiar with the grieving process. Always be sensitive to background chatter or conversations that could exacerbate the anxieties and grief clients experience during euthanasias or deaths of their pets.
- Provide clients with poetic memorials of their dead-on-arrival, died-during-hospitalization, or euthanized pets including a paw print stamp. Return collars, leashes, and other accessories.
- Handle angry or grieving clients in a calm, reassuring manner. Escort complaining or angry clients from the reception area to a separate, closed room where their complaints may be heard privately. When necessary, enlist a doctor or the office manager to resolve the complaint.
- Assist clients to their cars if needed.

### **Medical-Record Management Tasks**

- Understand the medical software.
- Check on the immunizations or reminder status of arriving pets.
- Properly use bins, pin boards, or slots assigned to doctors, staff, pharmacy, lab, and callbacks.
- For patients being admitted to the facility, attach cage cards and completed client forms to the records.
- Understand and use special record notations, including male, female, aggressive, caution, no credit/charging, and/or inactive.

- Record doctors' and technicians' notes in patients' computer records.
- Make notes in patients' files of relevant phone or in-person conversations with clients, and include a timestamp before or after such entries.
- Verify and/or witness clients' statements regarding procedures, including euthanasias. Sign consent forms as witness.
- Check files for completeness of notes, charges, callbacks, and reminders before leaving. Ensure that records include current laboratory tests, procedure results, current patients' weights, immunizations, diagnoses, and treatments.

## **Exam-Room Tasks**

- Possess sufficient strength and assertiveness to effectively restrain patients and ensure the safety of clients and personnel.
- Clean and straighten exam rooms to prepare for incoming patients. Spray disinfectant on exam tables, wipe them clean, and dry them. Remove sources of offensive odors; empty trash if necessary. Check floors, walls, doors, and counters, and sweep or clean them as needed to remove hair, body fluids, and dirt.
- Measure and record each patient's weight, temperature, pulse rate, and respiratory rate.
- Answer questions and educate clients about basic pet care and procedures including nutrition; internal and external parasite control; immunization protocols; the administration of topical, oral, otic, and ophthalmic medications; spay and neuter procedures; and behavior and training. Refer questions you cannot answer to appropriate colleagues.
- Using aseptic procedures, draw up vaccines and/or injections that doctors will administer.
- Administer vaccines subcutaneously and intramuscularly. Follow the practice's policies, the manufacturers' directions, and AAFP guidelines for the placement of vaccines.
- Dispose of used needles and syringes and other sharp objects as set forth by the practice's policy and OSHA standards.
- Perform suture removals, nail trims, and wing trims.
- Assist with routine exam-room procedures, such as venipunctures, skin scrapings, fine-needle aspirates, corneal stains, and ear treatments.
- Lay out and/or set up instruments that doctors will use during ophthalmic, otic, oral, and/or skin examinations, as determined by the patients' presenting complaints, prior to the doctors' arrivals in rooms.
- Take photographs or videos of patients' conditions and lesions as directed by veterinarians.
- Record doctors' findings during medical examinations.
- Keep a small notebook in your pocket to record accurate instructions, particularly regarding the preparation and administering medications to be dispensed.
- Keep exam rooms stocked with syringes, needles, bandage materials, and prepackaged dispensable products. Regularly restock exam rooms or pharmacy refrigerators with vaccines.
- Inform the practice manager or doctors immediately of all bite or scratch wounds you suffer so that reports can be made and you can be referred for timely medical care by a physician if necessary. Clean all wounds quickly and thoroughly.

## **Nursing-Care Tasks**

### *Basic Patient-Care Tasks*

- Prioritize tasks to maximize clients' satisfaction and patients' health.
- Track and use or store comfort items brought by clients for hospitalized patients.
- Wash, dry, and store patients' bedding and the practice's towels. Maintain bedding in good repair.

- Do not mix “front-use” towels with “back-use” towels to prevent damage to the towels or the appearance of disrepair.
- Place clean, soft bedding in cages as appropriate.
- Maximize patients’ comfort with a gentle and reassuring manner. Understand that actions that would constitute animal cruelty under state or local laws or the practice’s policies will be grounds for immediate reprimand and/or termination.
- Monitor patients for vomit, blood, urine, and feces in the cage, and clean patients and cages as needed. Save debris if unsure whether it should be examined. Note unexpected incidents on cage cards and/or medical record.
- Monitor patients’ behaviors and note potentially aggressive behaviors. Use caution when handling aggressive or potentially aggressive pets. Request assistance when needed.
- Monitor changes in patients’ conditions. Alert doctors or technicians to significant changes.
- Follow isolation procedures. Prevent contact between contagious animals and others. Using the designated products and dilutions for disinfectants, properly disinfect your shoes, hands, and clothing before leaving isolation areas.
- Walk dogs on a double leash. Ensure that they are restrained and under your control at all times.
- Prepare meals and feed animals. Note appetite on cage cards or patient records.
- Assess hospitalized patients’ temperatures, pulse rates, respiratory rates, and respiratory qualities, and record data in appropriate records.
- Deflea patients with flea combs, flea sprays, spot-on topicals, baths, dips, or appropriate medication.
- Detick patients using proper instruments or techniques.
- Provide medical grooming, including medicated baths, dips, and mat removal.
- Clip hair in a manner that minimizes clipper burn. Maintain clean clipper blades and lubricate them on a regular basis.
- Use warning stickers and notations on cage cards and records as appropriate.
- Prior to discharge, remove patients’ catheters, clean patients so that no body fluids are detectable, and bathe and/or groom patients prior to transferring them to clients. Use Groom-Aid, as needed.
- Disinfect cages as soon as possible after patients are removed from them.

### *Patient-Treatment Tasks*

- Understand the mechanics and application of basic standards of asepsis.
- Maintain IV catheters so fluids flow freely; flush and clean as needed.
- Administer IV, IM, SQ, and oral medications and note in medical record.
- Assist in the application of wound dressings and treatments.
- Swab, clean, flush, and treat ear canals without causing trauma.
- Trim nails to the quick without causing bleeding.
- Understand how to stop bleeding by using styptic pencils, powder, or other means.
- Monitor and maintain urinary collection bags. Record urine production on cage cards and in charts.
- Identify a patient’s level of pain and possible causes of pain, and understand the medications and methods used to control pain.
- Assist kennel staff in medicating and treating boarders.

### **Technical Tasks**

#### *General Technical Tasks*

- Restrain pets in a manner that allows necessary work to be performed, minimizes stress to patients, and ensures the safety of patients and people. Safely and effectively apply and use restraints such as muzzles, towels, gloves, and cat bags.
- Perform venipunctures using patients' cephalic, saphenous, and jugular veins in a manner that minimizes trauma to patients and injury to veins and allows you to successfully obtain a nonhemolyzed sample.
- Collect urine and fecal samples. Use fecal loops for stool collection as needed.
- Prepare slides of body fluids. Air dry and stain them as directed.
- Make blood smears with properly feathered edges that ensure accurate white and red blood cell interpretation.
- Maintain stains and other supplies in a manner that avoids contamination and ensures correct results.
- Use proper stain techniques to maximize diagnostic interpretation of prepared slides.
- Maintain test kits under proper environmental conditions.
- Understand the paperwork and procedures of outside laboratories used by the practice.
- Perform routine ELISA tests, such as heartworm and feline viral tests. Set up and read urine specific gravities, hemocrits, and total protein tests.
- Perform fecal examinations, including direct, centrifugation, and flotation procedures.
- Set up and read Azostix®, blood glucose test strips, and urinalysis dipsticks.
- Assist with euthanasia procedures. Hold off veins and release pressure at the appropriate times.

### *Emergency-Care Tasks*

- Apply temporary bandages or splints.
- Provide basic life support, including CPR, airway maintenance, and oxygen therapy.
- Control bleeding using pressure bandages and tourniquets.
- Provide cooling baths and/or enemas for heatstroke patients.

### *Surgical-Assistance Tasks*

- Know the names of instruments and where they are stored.
- Prepare the surgery suite(s) for incoming patients.
- Bring surgical patients to the surgical prep area. Ensure that you have the correct patients by checking cage cards, affixed identifications, and patients' markings and records.
- Check surgery schedules and patients' records to determine procedures to be performed.
- Assist veterinary technicians in administering preoperative medications.
- Under the direction of doctors or technicians, prepare patients for surgery. Trim nails. Clip surgical fields with straight margins. Minimize tissue trauma. Properly scrub and prepare surgical fields. Maintain clean fields when moving patients.
- Attach cardiac and respiratory monitors, pulse oximeters, or ECG monitors to anesthetized patients.
- Properly position and align patients for surgery.
- Use circulating water baths and/or hot-water bottles to maintain the body temperatures of surgical and dental patients.
- Ground patients when using electrocautery.
- Assist surgeons with aseptic gowning and gloving.
- Wear personal dosimeters as recommended by dosimeter provider.
- Monitor patients during surgery for depth of anesthesia, color, temperature, respiratory rate, and heart rate. Alert doctors to changes in condition.
- Monitor patients' recovery. Protect patients from aspiration and hypothermia. Deflate cuffs and remove endotracheal tubes as soon as gag reflexes return.

### *Surgical Cleaning Tasks*

- Clean operating rooms and equipment after use.
- Clean floors and counters in surgical prep and recovery areas, treatment rooms, and wards after use and as needed.
- Wash, sterilize, and store endotracheal tubes using techniques that prevent the spread of disease.
- Clean surgical instruments by hand and/or ultrasonic cleaner.
- Operate and maintain the autoclave.
- Pack and autoclave instruments. Using lists of instruments or photos as guides, ensure that packs contain the proper numbers and types of instruments and that they are labeled with dates and types of packs. Apply pressure and temperature sterilization tape and/or monitors, and verify effectiveness after autoclaving.

### *Radiology Tasks*

- Assist veterinary technicians and/or doctors with restraint and positioning of patients for radiographic procedures.
- Minimize radiation hazards. Use protective equipment and wear exposure badges whenever exposing radiographs.
- Consistently place right and left markers during radiography.
- Properly save radiographs to the medical record and create CD for client of the radiographs. Provide the CD to the clients for their own records.

While extensive, this job description does not cover every task or duty that might be assigned. Additional responsibilities may be assigned as necessary. If you have questions or concerns about this job description, please feel free to contact the General Manager.