

Veterinary technicians: The case for their employment in bovine practice

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Abstract

Employing credentialed veterinary technicians as part of the veterinary medical team enables veterinarians to use their time and skills to make diagnoses, develop prognoses, prescribe treatments, and perform surgeries, while delegating other tasks that require skill and knowledge to the veterinary technician. Practices that employ and properly leverage veterinary technicians can see benefits in several areas, including client services, time management, and profitability.

Résumé

Le recours à des techniciens vétérinaires diplômés au sein des équipes de médecine vétérinaire permet aux vétérinaires de consacrer leur temps et leurs compétences à poser des diagnostics, à préparer des pronostics, à prescrire des traitements et à pratiquer des chirurgies, tout en déléguant au technicien vétérinaire les autres tâches qui exigent des compétences et des connaissances. Les pratiques qui emploient des techniciens et qui les utilisent à bon escient constatent des avantages dans plusieurs domaines, notamment pour les services aux clients, la gestion du temps et la rentabilité.

Client Services

Employing a credentialed veterinary technician enables a practice to offer more services to more clients, particularly when the technician is empowered to work independently. For example, some dairy practices employ technicians who dehorn calves for dairy clients. This is a service that clients value, but they may not wish to pay the rate that would be necessary for this to be a profitable task for a veterinarian. In feedlot practice, veterinary technicians may be trained to perform “virtual necropsies”, with findings reported as words and pictures to a veterinarian for diagnosis. Other opportunities for veterinary technicians to work independently include rechecks, administering treatments prescribed by the veterinarian, estrus synchronization and artificial insemination, and mastitis microbiology tasks. The range of services a veterinary technician can provide to clients is limited only by the imagination of the practice owner, the abilities of the technician, and the veterinary practice act. A credentialed veterinary technician can enable a practice to expand the range of services it offers to clients, and the number of clients who can be accommodated.

Time Management

Veterinary practice acts generally define the practice of veterinary medicine as some combination of diagnosing, prescribing, formulating prognoses, and performing surgery. Duties other than these may be performed by paraprofessionals. Veterinary technicians are uniquely prepared to assume tasks in veterinary practice that require skills and knowledge, but not a veterinary degree. When veterinary technicians and veterinarians work as a team, with the technician handling tasks that do not require a veterinarian’s expertise, more time becomes available for the veterinarian to perform veterinary duties. This increase in available time for the veterinarian may be used to schedule more clients in the same amount of time, improving the practice’s profitability, or the veterinarian may choose to see the same number of clients in a decreased amount of time, making more time available away from work and improving quality of life.

Profitability

In 2007, the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* published a report from Jasper Fanning and Allison Shepherd which concluded that “the typical veterinarian’s gross income increased by \$93,311 for each additional credentialed veterinary technician per veterinarian in the practice.” This effect was seen only with credentialed veterinary technicians (licensed, registered or certified); employment of non-credentialed technicians was not associated with increased income. It can be concluded that there is something about practices that employ credentialed veterinary technicians that makes them have increased income. In addition to providing additional labor, veterinary technicians can facilitate a thoughtful evaluation of the tasks in a practice and the assignment of each task to an appropriate member of the veterinary medical team. Each member of the team should perform only those tasks that cannot be performed by a person with less training and/or credentialing. It is likely that this approach to assigning tasks in a veterinary practice contributes substantially to increased income in those practices that employ credentialed veterinary technicians.

Conclusion

Employment of veterinary technicians in bovine practice improves the range and capacity of veterinary practices, while easing time constraints and improving income.



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