

Veterinary Technician Program

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Thinking Outside the Box: Utilizing Veterinary Technicians in Food Animal Practice

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Abstract

Do the veterinarians in your clinic work too many hours and still not have time to get everything accomplished? There are many traditional options to remedy this situation, such as working more hours or not taking any new clients. However, there is another option...hiring a Registered (Certified) Veterinary Technician. You're probably asking yourself "How will this help me?" We will answer that question during this presentation and have you beginning to "think outside the box"!

Each practice situation will bring unique opportunities based upon the type of practice and applicable laws for its location. These tasks, delegated by the veterinarian to the technician, may include both traditional "nursing" skills as well as tasks in your herd health programs. This team approach, though new in food animal practice, has been long used in the human nursing and dental professions. The bottom line is that utilizing technicians as part of the veterinary team will positively impact the clinic business... the doctors are more efficient, the technicians are challenged to do what they are trained to do and the client gets outstanding service.

Introduction

Is the veterinarian in your practice working too many hours and still not getting all the things done that he/she would like? Are they also doing much of the work a technician is trained to do? We need to evaluate other professions that apply a team concept and extrapolate how that process can be used in the veterinary profession.

When is the last time you went for a dental check-up and the dentist cleaned your teeth instead of the hygienist? When is the last time you went to the physician and never saw the nurse? Does the doctor give the immunizations and the hormone shots? When a person is

in labor does the obstetrician monitor the patient until delivery? Many of the medical professions use trained "nurses" to become a team with the doctor. In doing so, they have increased the amount of patients they can see in a day while still maintaining a high level of care. In other words, they have become more efficient. The veterinary profession is no different than human medicine in this regard.

As food animal veterinary practices change from emergency based medicine to a production medicine focus, the veterinarian is being relied on for more and more information. Not only do they handle the health concerns, but they are now also consultants for management issues such as nutrition, genetics and records. How can the already busy veterinarian satisfy the progressive client's desire for more information? Traditional options are to work more hours, hire a new veterinarian or simply decline the request to provide additional service. However, there's one more option that is often overlooked – hiring a Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT) to be part of the veterinary team.

The goal of this presentation is to explore areas where veterinary technicians can be utilized both in traditional veterinary practices as well as herd health / production medicine practices. During our discussion we will talk about the laws that must be followed when using an RVT, as well as ways to utilize a technician to their (and the clinics) fullest potential.

Law and Ethics

Graduates of an accredited veterinary technician program are trained to follow ethical and legal guidelines expected of a veterinary technician working under veterinary supervision. The employing veterinarian has the ultimate responsibility for utilizing technicians in an appropriate manner consistent with all veterinary

laws, regulations and ethical codes applicable to that state. State practice acts vary widely and must be reviewed closely. We will later review definitions and guidelines as outlined by the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America.

The universal legal principle on delegation is that the veterinary employer in clinical practice is responsible for the acts of all employees. The veterinary technician may perform all medical and nursing duties commensurate with the education and training they have received. The exception to this is that no RVT can diagnose or prognose animal diseases and conditions, prescribe drugs or therapy, or perform surgery. The definition of surgery varies and must be looked at based upon your practice location.

If there is ever litigation brought against an RVT/Veterinarian team, the American courts will apply the following common law test:

1. Did the technician mislead the client into thinking that he/she was the veterinarian?
2. Was the technician under the direction and control of a licensed veterinarian?
3. Is the technician competent to do what is asked of him/her? Training at an accredited institution and state certification (RVT, CVT, LVT) will easily meet this test whereas OJTs must prove their competency with expert witness testimony.
4. Was reasonable and prudent judgement used by the technician?
5. Was a state law (practice act) broken?¹

Definitions

NAVTA defines supervision in three ways:

- Immediate supervision – a licensed veterinarian is within direct eyesight and hearing range
- Direct supervision – a licensed veterinarian is on the premises and is readily available
- Indirect supervision – a licensed veterinarian is not on the premises, but (the technician) is able to perform the duties of a licensed veterinarian by maintaining direct communication

These levels of supervision have only been defined in the past couple of years and therefore are not included in many state practice acts. Many states, however, do define the limits for what NAVTA classifies as indirect supervision. For example, Wisconsin states "Where the veterinarian is not required to be personally present on the premises where the delegated services are provided, [he] must be available at all times for consultation either in person or within 15 minutes of contact by telephone or by two-way radio or television communication."²

Following Protocols

Although a veterinarian can delegate tasks, they are still required to maintain a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship. Also, it takes an extreme amount of trust for the veterinarian to send the technician out alone. It is important that protocols have been previously established. In unforeseen situations where there are not established protocols, verbal directions must be followed completely (some states require that verbal directions be written down and repeated to the veterinarian).

Tasks (related to food animal) Required for AVMA Accreditation:³

Castration/Dehorning
Tail docking
Dystocias
Prolapse repairs
Venipuncture (jugular and coccygeal)
Oral medicating (balling gun, dose syringe, speculum and tube)
Suture removal
Hoof trimming
CBC
Blood chemistry
Parasitologic sample collection and identification
Necropsy
Milk sampling and mastitis testing (CMT, culture)
Radiography

To maintain accreditation, institutions are required to ensure that students have knowledge of the above tasks. This means that upon graduation, an RVT should be expected to competently perform or assist in such duties.

Traditional Veterinary Practice

Processing Calves

- Vaccinating
- Dehorning
- Branding/tattooing
- Implanting
- Castrating
- Deworming

Surgical Assistance

- C-Section
- DA Surgery
- Teaser Bull

Pharmaceuticals & Supplies

- Ordering
- Inventory control
- Product preparation

- Stocking/cleaning truck
- Filling client prescriptions/order

Laboratory

- Non-surgical specimen collection
- Blood collection
- Routine lab test procedures (panel, etc)
- Bulk tank samples

Client Education

- Brochures (BQA, common diseases)
- FAQ

Billing

Scheduling

Herd Health or Production Medicine Practice **All of the above tasks plus the following:**

Records

- Input data
- Analyze data

Fertility

- Body condition scoring
- Estrus synchronization programs
- Artificial insemination

Genetics

- Breed recommendations
- Sire selections

Environment

- Intensive grazing plan assistance
- Pasture renovation

Health

- Devise herd health calendars specific for each herd
- Client education handouts

Marketing

- Assist seedstock producers with goals
- Assist feeders to sell on appropriate grid

Nutrition

- Feedstuff analysis
- Ration balancing/year long nutrition plan
- Samples through particle separator

Herd Checks (dairy)

- BQA
- Marking/identifying cows as needed
- Bulk tank samples and culturing
- Milking equipment check

So, how does a technician "pay his/her way"? The veterinarian should charge a reasonable fee to the producer for the work and services the technician provides. A general rule of thumb is 25% of the veterinarians hourly rate. Additionally, in a beef practice where the work is quite seasonal a clinic should develop and package "programs" that will assist the producer in realizing a greater income. For example, a Heifer Development Program could be initiated for a fee of \$30/heifer.

This program could include:

- reproductive exam (by veterinarian)
- pre-breeding vaccinations
- yearling weight and records analysis
- body condition scoring
- ration development
- estrus synchronization program calendar and products
- selection of AI sires
- artificially inseminating heifers

Under the direction of a licensed veterinarian, the technician could perform all of the tasks in the program except the reproductive exam. There are many other programs that could be developed to benefit the producer and by using a technician to implement them the veterinarian is not stretching himself even further.

As you can see, there are many places where an experienced veterinary technician could be a valuable asset to the practice. So go ahead and ask the veterinarian if he'd like to get caught up on his herd visit reports next Friday afternoon and you (the technician) go out and booster the calves being weaned. It is important to "think outside the box" and come up with new ways to utilize a technician in your food animal practice.

References

1. Harold Hannah, address to Purdue Veterinary Technology students, November 19, 1976.
2. Ch VE7.02 Wisconsin Standards of Practice and Unprofessional Conduct for Veterinarians
3. Accreditation Policies & Procedures of the Committee on Veterinary Technician Education and Activities November, 1999, pp 16-23.