VETERINARY ASSISTANT JOB DESCRIPTION

Veterinary assistants have a broad range of responsibilities and will typically 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 ideally will have completed some form of professional training and will be expected to pursue significant on-the-job training.

General Knowledge and Tasks

General Knowledge

- Know the range of services the practice provides and the species it treats.
- Be reasonably familiar with breeds and coat colors.
- Accurately estimate weights of patients.
- Give directions to the practice.
- Follow OSHA standards. Be able to find 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.

General Tasks

- Always be in position and prepared to work by the start of each scheduled shift.
- Ensure accurate personal time records are made via the practice management software system.
- Be aware of cleanliness of clinic and grounds. Routinely pick up trash or feces from the parking lot, sidewalks, or entryways.
- 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.
- 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 pet health insurance 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.
• Call in prescriptions to outside pharmacies.
• 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.
• Conduct tours of the practice and/or kennel. Before each tour, ensure that the facility is orderly and that staff and patients are prepared for tours.
• 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.
• Always employ proper use of personal protective gear when handling medical or biological waste.
• Participate in daily housekeeping or facility maintenance activities as directed.

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.
• Inform clients of recommended services for their pets and obedience training or special health care programs offered by the practice.
• Be able to discuss with clients general information regarding internal and external parasite control, diets, over-the-counter 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.
• 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 refreshments to clients or water to patients in need (when medically 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.
• Dispense medications. Discuss administration or application of products and potential side effects with owners as instructed by doctors or technicians.
• Accurately invoice clients from charges on travel or circle sheets or medical records.
• Receive and record client payments.
• 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 memorials of their dead-on-arrival, died-during-hospitalization, or euthanized pets, (e.g., locks of hair, paw prints, or paw molds). 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 hospital administrator to resolve the complaint.
• Assist clients transport their pets to and from vehicles if needed.

Medical-Record Management Tasks

• Understand the medical-record filing system.
• Know all possible locations for storage of records of hospitalized patients.
• Locate medical files for hospitalized, surgical, or incoming patients.
• Check on the immunizations or reminder status of arriving pets.
• Properly use bins or slots assigned to doctors, staff, pharmacy, lab, and callbacks.
• Ensure a travel sheet is properly marked with the patient’s and client’s names for each arriving client.
• For patients being admitted to the facility, attach cage cards and completed client forms to the travel sheet.
• 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 or on paper records.
• Make notes in patients’ files of relevant phone or in-person conversations with clients, and place your initials after such entries.
• Verify and/or witness clients’ statements regarding procedures, including euthanasias.
• Check files for completeness of notes, charges, callbacks, and reminders before refileing. Ensure that records include current laboratory tests, procedure results, current patients’ weights, immunizations, diagnoses, and treatments.
• Accurately file all paper medical records.
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.
- Obtain and record patient histories from clients.
- Be able to 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.
- Vaccinate pets under supervision of doctors or technicians. Follow manufacturers’ directions and guidelines for placement of injectable vaccines at appropriate sites.
- Dispose of used needles and syringes and other sharp objects as set forth by the practice’s policy and OSHA standards.
- Perform suture removals and nail 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 or personal digital assistant (PDA) 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 hospital administrator 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 and Environmental Tasks

- Prioritize tasks to maximize clients’ satisfaction and patients’ health.
- Maintain controlled-substance logs with patients’ names, doctors’ names, types and amounts of drugs used, amounts of drugs remaining, and your signature.
• Keep controlled drugs secured to meet Drug Enforcement Agency and state board specifications.
• All medications and diets prescribed by a doctor will be verified by two staff members and initialed prior to distribution to client.
• Track, use, and/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.
• Provide occupants with clean, soft bedding.
• Clean cages when they are soiled, and scoop or change litter boxes as needed.
• 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.
• Be familiar with and adopt common Fear Free practices in keeping with clinic policies.
• 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 or charts.
• 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 or on a leash within a fenced exercise area. 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.
• 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.
• Complete and update cage cards. 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.
• 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 charts.
• Assist in the application of wound dressings and treatments.
• Monitor, adjust, and maintain IV infusion pumps.
• Administer routine enemas.
• Use cotton swabs to clean ears, bulb syringes to flush them, curettes to remove debris, and catheters to irrigate ear canals. Administer ear treatments without causing trauma, and teach clients how to complete this task.
• Trim nails to the quick without causing bleeding.
• 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.
• 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.
• Deflea patients with flea combs, flea sprays, spot-on topicals, baths, dips, or appropriate medication.
• Detick patients using proper instruments or techniques.
• 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 patient stress, and ensures their safety and that of other people.
• Safely and effectively apply and use restraint devices, including 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 blood glucose test strips and urinalysis dipsticks.
• Assist with euthanasia procedures. Hold off veins and release pressure at the appropriate times.
Emergency-Care Tasks

- Provide basic life support, including CPR, airway maintenance, and oxygen therapy.
- Apply temporary bandages or splints.
- 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.
- Understand aseptic principles and apply them to surgical patients, instruments, equipment, and rooms.
- 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.
- 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.
- Properly scrub hands and arms for surgical cleanliness, and
- Assist surgeons with aseptic gowning and gloving.
- 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.
- Dispose of used needles and syringes and other sharp objects as set forth by the practice’s policy and OSHA standards.
- 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 during radiographic exposures.
• Consistently place right and left markers.
• Understand the radiograph filing system. Properly file and/or retrieve files.