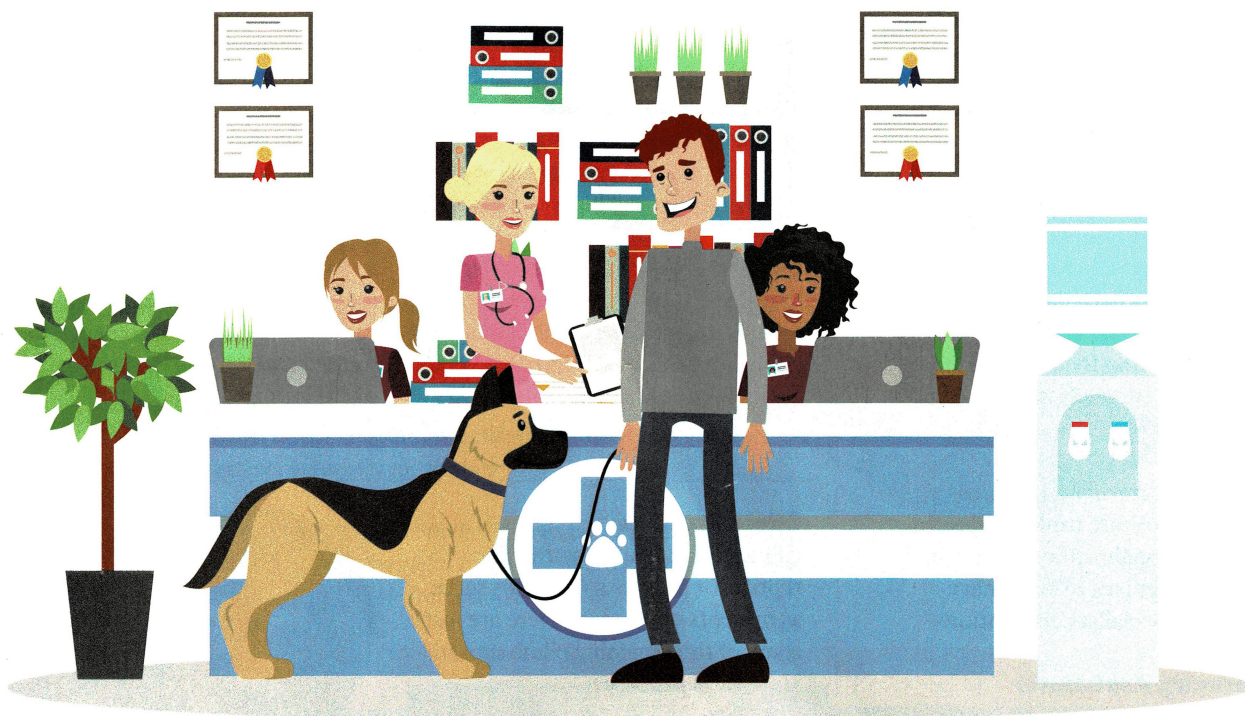


Who's Who in Your Vet's Office

By Andrea Vardaro Tucker, ELS



Outside of rural areas, most pet parents don't have a lone veterinarian who regularly makes house calls. Bustling practices are becoming the norm, and, while pet parents can certainly identify their pet's veterinarian, they might not know what roles everyone else in the practice plays.

Here are just some of the positions you'll encounter at a veterinary clinic.

Veterinarians

Anywhere from one to several veterinarians might work within a practice, and although you probably schedule most visits with one in particular, you might see other vets for emergency or other visits. Many practice owners are also veterinarians, although not always.

After spending at least 2 years at a university, aspiring veterinarians attend veterinary school for approximately 4 more years to earn a doctor of

veterinary medicine (DVM) or veterinary medical doctor (VMD) degree. Veterinarians must pass one or more licensing exams, and many complete internships and residencies. Continuing education is also required.

Veterinarians can be generalists (akin to human primary care doctors) or specialists. Veterinary specialists—a growing field—complete additional training and testing in a specific area of veterinary medicine. The American Veterinary Medical Association, or AVMA, recognizes 41 specialties from 22 unique veterinary specialty organizations. You can spot a veterinary specialist by diplomate status, which is indicated by a set of initials following his or her name and degree(s)—like DACVB for “Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists” or DACVECC for “Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care.”

Veterinary Technicians/Nurses

Veterinary technicians or nurses usually need a 2-year education, associate degree, and testing. Most states offer licenses for vet techs based on government requirements, and still others offer private credentialing. Utah currently has no credentialing. You might see LVT, RVT, or CVT after your vet techs' names depending on whether they're licensed, registered, or certified, respectively.

Because of this confusion surrounding credentialing, the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, or NAVTA, has launched the Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI) to push to rename veterinary technicians as “nurses” for clarity and a more accurate description of their roles.

“The term ‘nurse’ is so prevalent and understood in our society,” explains Cornell University College of Veterinary

inspiring/Shutterstock

Medicine's Kenichiro Yagi, MS, RVT, VTS (ECC) (SAIM), a veterinary technician specialist in emergency and critical care and small animal internal medicine who serves as NAVTA president and co-chair of the VNI. "The title change is a big part of what's going to drive the change we want to see."

It's also important to note that vet techs aren't veterinarians in training. "I think that there's a perception that being a veterinary technician is a consolation prize," Kenichiro says. "This is an actual career choice that focuses on the nursing care. We really have an impact on the patient."

And as with veterinarians, techs—like Kenichiro—are trending toward increased specialization. Right now, NAVTA recognizes 16 veterinary technician specialist certifications.

Veterinary Assistants

Distinct from veterinary technicians, veterinary assistants do just what the name suggests: They assist both techs and vets with caring for animals and facilities. Assistants might help in the exam room or be behind the scenes managing kennels, feeding or walking animals, or performing office tasks. Veterinary assistants can complete a training program, but no credentials are currently offered.

Receptionists

Just like receptionists at any business, those at veterinary practices greet visitors, answer phone and online inquiries, handle some of the clinic's billing and marketing, book appointments, and more. But these receptionists might also have some medical training—or at least be animal lovers. They also sometimes go by *client* or *customer service representatives*, better encompassing their service orientation.

Business Managers

A number of administrative roles help

keep veterinary practices running. **Office managers** rank above **receptionists** and usually perform general office-related tasks from the front desk. Next, practice managers are often involved in everything from hiring and training office staff to managing finances, equipment, and supplies to leading hospital safety and security efforts. Typically, the highest-ranking people on the business end are **hospital administrators**, who manage hospital operations plus veterinary associates. In larger practices, the administrator might have earned the "Certified Veterinary Practice Manager," or *CVPM*,

but smaller practices often have just one person manage all aspects of the business.

Managing a veterinary practice has some unique challenges. "We don't typically pay well in veterinary medicine; therefore, acquiring and retaining quality people is challenging," explains Mark Opperman, CVPM, president of VMC Incorporated, based in Parker, Colorado. "They are the lowest paid professional of any medical professional. They're so dedicated to the profession and to the caring of the animals."

Clinic Mascots

Clinic cats, dogs, or exotics like reptiles or parrots sometimes serve as mascots or greeters. Here are just some of the charming clinic cats at *HealthyPet* practices:

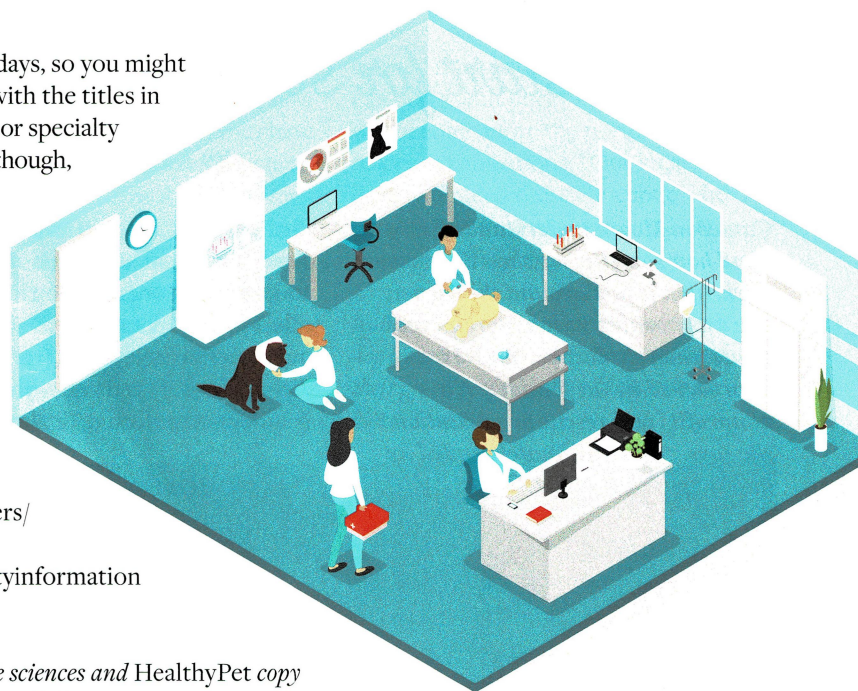
- **Pumpkin** is a 2- to 3-year-old Domestic Shorthair office cat and mascot at Lake Animal Hospital in Storm Lake, Iowa. After Pumpkin was likely hit by a car, his previous owner surrendered him to the hospital, where he had surgery to fix his dislocated hip. "We can't imagine him not being a part of our office," says office manager Lori Nehring. "All our clients get a kick out of him."
- **Vinnie**, an almost-11-year-old Domestic Shorthair, was surrendered to Clinton Veterinary Hospital in Clinton, Massachusetts, a year ago, unable to use his legs because of undiagnosed diabetes. Now the hospital's first feline ambassador, Vinnie's grown stronger and his diabetes is in remission. "Vinnie has brought comfort and love into the practice," says Kerry Maynard, veterinary technician/administrator. "He has quickly become a favorite in the local community."
- **CC**, or **Clinic Cat**, is the approximately 14-year-old office manager, or "the boss," at Desert Vet in Hurricane, Utah. Dr. Allen Bice found the presumably Siamese/Ragdoll mix with an injured leg near his home, and when the practice couldn't locate CC's family, they amputated his leg and took him in. Office manager Cathy Erickson says, "He seems to have a calming influence on the pets who need it or will sit quietly by owners waiting in our euthanasia room. Children love him and give him the attention that he begs for from them."



Veterinary clinics offer more services than ever nowadays, so you might encounter any number of people (or animals!) there with the titles in this article or even those who offer grooming, training, or specialty services. No matter their role, responsibilities, or title, though, they're all there to help pets live their healthiest lives.

To Learn More

- **Veterinary specialties:** avma.org/education/veterinary-specialties
- **Veterinary specialists:** avma.org/education/veterinary-specialties/what-veterinary-specialists-do
- **Veterinary team:** avma.org/resources/pet-owners/yourvet/veterinary-health-care-team
- **Veterinary training:** avma.org/resources/pet-owners/yourvet/veterinary-training
- **Vet tech/nurse specialties:** navta.net/page/specialtyinformation
- **Veterinary Nurse Initiative:** veterinarynurse.org



Andrea Vardaro Tucker, a board-certified editor in the life sciences and HealthyPet copy editor, and the rest of her human family are grateful to the skilled veterinarians and other team members who take loving care of their 11-year-old Westie, Cole.

Inspiring/Shutterstock

VET SPOTLIGHT

"I adopted Walter, a now-3-year-old Papillon, from the National Mill Dog Rescue (NMDR) in Colorado Springs, Colorado, after he flashed across my Facebook page and I fell in love. Once the adoption was approved, my husband and I decided to drive to Colorado from our home in Iowa to pick up our new puppy.

We arrived on a Saturday and again fell instantly in love with Walter. When we were driving home, he had a little cough, so I called a veterinarian first thing in the morning. Walter received antibiotics, but when he started to deteriorate, I looked for a second opinion.

I reached out to Dr. Erin Garman, and she immediately saw Walter and gave him the royal treatment. This little fella weighing in at only 3 pounds was quite a challenge. The pup had pneumonia, and his white blood cell count was off the chart. He needed IV fluids, additional antibiotics, and love. Many nights I thought this little boy would die in my arms, and each day I would call or take Walter in to see Dr. Garman, and she would



Walter

Dr. Erin Garman
Linn Animal Hospital,
Marion, IA

*Thanks to Jill Jones from
Cedar Rapids, IA, for submitting
this heartwarming story:*

do what was necessary to help him. She even brought Walter's case to a table of veterinarians to come up with other ideas, as we both thought he would die. He was so little and so sick, but she (we) did not give up.

Being diligent and keeping up with treatments, we started to see signs of improvement in Walter after a couple months. He was getting better, and I am so thankful for Dr. Garman.

The NMDR supported our mission in getting Walter healthy so he could live a long and happy life with us, and they reimbursed us for all the vet expenses, which totaled thousands of dollars. I support this organization fully and respect and appreciate what they do daily.

Walter is now 8 pounds and doing great. He does have a little lung damage, but other than that, he is active and full of energy. He loves Dr. Garman and goes in for his exams with pride. He is such a sweet personality. He was saved not only once by NMDR but again with our adoption and then again with Dr. Garman. Walter is a fighter—an inspiration to us all—and so is Dr. Garman. She needs to be recognized for her valiant efforts in saving our precious Walter. Dr. Garman is an amazing vet, and we are forever grateful."