

The Role of the Veterinary Nursing Assistant in a Veterinary Practice



We are often asked by our students and veterinary clinics about the roles undertaken by a Veterinary Nursing Assistant (VNA). The following summarises the key jobs that may be undertaken by Veterinary Nursing Assistants in clinic as well as limitations with this role. It is likely that the role of the VNA will vary between clinics. For example, in a large clinic where a number of registered Veterinary Nurses (RVN) are employed, the VNA will often have a defined role assisting them in their duties.

With all tasks it important that the clinic ensure that the VNA has been adequately trained by the supervisor at the veterinary practice and they are familiar with practice protocols in place.

Cleaning

This is probably the most common task undertaken by a VNA. Each practice will have their own protocols related to how kennels etc. are cleaned and set up which the VNA should be familiar with.

Reception Duties

VNAs will have learnt a fair amount about communication, professional behaviour, dealing with client queries and are aware of the limits of their knowledge. They should be made aware of all relevant practice protocols, and like a VN, should not enter into discussions with a client regarding potential diagnoses or treatment of their pet or provide advice where they are unsure.

VNAs should be encouraged to always seek the advice of a suitably qualified member of staff if they are unsure.

Medications

VNAs may be involved in dispensing prescribed drugs and helping with stock control in the dispensary. Like a VN, a VNA should not be involved in the prescribing of any medications to clients for their pets and should always seek the advice of a veterinarian or RVN should a client request a prescription. VNAs can supply products to clients in the 'unrestricted' or 'over-the-counter' category provided they have suitable product knowledge.

In-patient Care

VNAs may be asked to help with administering medication to inpatients. A VNA may only give treatment that has been prescribed by a veterinarian for the animal in question and only by the oral (tablet, liquid, paste), aural (drops, suspensions) or topical (spot-on, shampoos, creams) and sub-cutaneous routes.

Administration of medication should only be carried out under supervision of a vet or RVN. Intra-muscular and intra-venous injections should NOT be carried out by a VNA.

VNAs may assist with restraint of animals, setting up kennels for inpatients or doing basic checks on animals. Animal care may include:

- Restraining for blood tests, injections, claw clipping etc.
- Monitoring in-patients including temperature, pulse, respiration rates, urine and faeces.
- Checking and observation of intravenous fluids, bandages or wounds under the direction and supervision of a veterinarian or RVN.
- Providing appropriate food and water for patients as directed by the veterinarian or RVN
- Administering oral, aural, topical and sub-cutaneous medications under direct supervision
- Providing a suitable environment for in-patients including suitable choice of kennel, bedding and stress management, TLC and environmental enrichment
- Grooming of in-patients
- Toileting of in-patients
- Claw clipping for cats and dogs may be carried out by a VNA assuming they are suitably trained to do so.

The VNA is expected to report any abnormal findings immediately to a veterinarian, and record them accurately on the patient's records.

Anaesthesia

In some circumstances a VNA may be asked to **assist** with the monitoring of anaesthesia
Important points to note:

- VNAs may NOT induce anaesthesia by any means.
- VNAs may assist the veterinarian/RVN in assisting to monitor anaesthesia provided they are under direct supervision.
- VNAs should NOT make decisions related to changing anaesthetic depth/vaporiser settings themselves.
- The clinic must make a judgement on how competent the VNA is at anaesthetic monitoring before allowing them to take part in this activity. The ultimate responsibility for anaesthesia is that of the veterinarian.

Professional Behaviour and Communication

VNAs are expected to communicate effectively with all members of the veterinary team to provide high quality of patient care and prevention of mistakes.

VNAs are expected to uphold high standards of professional behaviour such as personal presentation, client confidentiality, time keeping, and animal welfare.

VNAs are expected to work in accordance with all relevant Health & Safety legislation and in accordance with MPI Codes of Welfare and Regulations.