

Chapter 1 Introduction



Hello, and welcome to Becoming a Veterinary Assistant. I'm Jeff Grognet and I'll be your instructor for the next six weeks as we explore the exciting world of animal care and veterinary medicine. Many people think that animal care only happens in an office setting with veterinarians in white lab coats taking blood and passing out medicine. However, there's also a practical side to animal care that everyone should know about. And that's just what I'm going to share with you. If you're a pet owner, you may be wondering if this is the right course for you. I'm happy to report that it is. I've tailored my course to provide everyone from the aspiring veterinary assistant to the concerned pet owner with sensible, valuable advice about caring for pets and patients alike. It's an insider's glimpse of what goes on behind the scenes at a veterinary's clinic. The information that I'll share with you will make you a smarter pet owner and a more valuable veterinary assistant.

Before we jump right in, I'd like to share a little bit about myself and why I dedicated my life to the care of animals. For as long as I could remember, I've wanted to be a veterinarian. As a child, I grew up surrounded by animals. With help from relatives, I would care for pets and any injured wild animals that happened across my path. This love of animals eventually became my career goal, and after seven years of education, I finally became a doctor of veterinary medicine.

I started out practicing medicine in a companion animal hospital. This hospital specialized in dogs, cats, and exotic animals like birds and rabbits. I joined as an associate and quickly became a partner. On the side, I dabbled in livestock (cows, pigs, sheep) and horses. With 12 years of experience, my wife (also a veterinarian) and I decided to open up our own practice. It was a dream come true when we opened the doors of our own practice for dogs and cats in 1995.

Since then, every day has been unique and challenging. Although we practice traditional medicine, we've recently added a new dimension by training in Chinese medicine to learn acupuncture. I then received accreditation in Veterinary Orthopedic Manipulation (VOM). This allows me to correct spinal problems in cats, dogs, and other domesticated animals. More recently, I've turned my attention to frequency-specific low

level laser. This tool can help arthritic pets but also those with heart problems, incontinence, and even cancer.

Beyond animal care, my other professional interests are teaching and writing about new topics in veterinary medicine. I've been a regular contributor to *Dogs in Canada*, the *AKC Gazette*, *AKC Family Dog*, and *Cattlemen* magazines, as well as a weekly columnist for the *Western Producer* newspaper. Over the years, I've written a large number of freelance articles for numerous agricultural and pet-oriented publications.

My teaching career came about almost by accident. After years of providing my staff with regular training sessions, a local college asked me to develop a veterinary receptionist and assistant program. It was a hit and became the inspiration for this online course.

Many students took the college course because they were employed at a veterinary hospital or were interested in pursuing a career in veterinary medicine. Surprisingly, however, the majority of people who enrolled were pet owners who wanted to improve the quality of care they provided to their pets.

With this in mind, I designed my lesson material to provide you with the knowledge you need to answer questions that regularly come up during a visit to a veterinarian. Some of the things we'll cover are questions about vaccinations, the spread of worms, the best diet for your pet, home dental care, an introduction to fleas and ticks, and much, much more. I'll also cover the essentials of pet first aid. This will help you deal effectively with minor pet emergencies at home. Finally, I'll introduce some of the alternative therapies out there that pet owners might have questions about.

At the end of the course, you'll be equipped to make informed health choices for your pets. For those of you working at veterinary hospitals, your knowledge will help your clients provide better care to their pets.

To get things started, we'll take a short but fascinating journey through the evolution of the veterinary profession and where trends are leading us in the future. Believe me, we've come a very long way from just 50 years ago! Then we'll take a look at where it all starts—reproduction. Because the majority of pets are cats and dogs, we'll focus on the process for these two animals.

So when you're ready, please click next at the bottom or top of your page and let's begin.
Chapter 2

A History of Veterinary Hospitals and Future Trends

Veterinary medicine has roots that reach back into ancient times. In the early days of the Roman Empire, animal caretakers were called *souvetaurinarii*. This is considered to be the origin of the word *veterinarian*. Because the only valuable animals were ones that

could be eaten or ridden, early medical practice was restricted to horses, cattle, pigs, and sheep.

At about 2000 BC over in Egypt, cats were domesticated and revered as symbols of fertility and protectors of children. This relationship sprung out of the cats' abilities to rid cities of vermin and poisonous snakes that plagued communities around the Nile. Caring for these companions became important, though medical care was almost nonexistent. Whenever a family cat died, the family members went into full mourning. Dogs, however, did not receive such reverence until medieval times in Europe when they became valuable as hunting companions. It was around this time that medical care started for man's best friend.

Jumping ahead in time to the beginning of the 19th century, cattle and horses were added to the list of animals that deserved medical attention. Once again, it was because of economic demands that they stay healthy that humans decided to provide medical care for them. Dogs became a sideline of large animal practice in the 20th century and the expendable cats were only viewed as useful for keeping vermin down in the barns. When the internal combustion engine was invented, it changed not only the world of transportation, but also the veterinary field. Horses dwindled in numbers, so veterinarians had to find something else to do. Dogs at last were considered important.

Eventually, hospitals sprang up that were devoted solely to companion animals. Soon, these canine-focused practices were thriving and the areas of canine medicine and surgery were born and expanded rapidly. Cats, on the other hand, didn't get the same amount of attention.

It wasn't until the 1970s that cats were recognized for their unique attributes. Prior to this time, cats were considered similar to small dogs and treated the same way. The assumption that their diseases mimicked those in dogs led to many fallacies and incorrect care. Veterinarians began specializing in feline medicine so there was a corresponding knowledge explosion.

Twenty-first Century Veterinary Care and Beyond

Today, clients demand excellent medical care for their dogs and cats. They want the same level of care for their pets that they expect for themselves. In response to this demand, veterinarians continue to explore these fields of animal care and it's been an explosion of exploration and knowledge ever since. The need for advanced care has also led to a high demand for board-certified veterinarians who specialize in specific areas of companion animal practice.

Technology, especially the internet, has also had an impact on veterinary medicine. I use it for educating myself and for discussing cases with other veterinarians. My clients also use it. If I mention a disease, it's not uncommon for them to go home, research the condition, and come back to me the next day with insightful questions. Information from

the internet is usually helpful, but it can be misleading. It must always be evaluated in the correct context. "Dr. Google" isn't always correct.

What does the future hold? In the past, veterinarians had an ever-expanding number of patients so they were guaranteed success in practice. In the last fifteen years, that climate has changed dramatically. There is now a surplus of veterinarians, so much so that some veterinary colleges are considering reducing enrollment.

Because of this competition, just opening a hospital will not ensure that a practice is profitable. Veterinarians have to be good business managers who can attract and keep clients. Word of mouth referrals are critical. A veterinarian must be competent, but more importantly, clients and patients must be treated correctly by skilled and knowledgeable staff at the hospital. Also, specializing in any one of the many new fields can also help a veterinary practice succeed. Some of those areas are dentistry, ophthalmology, surgery, behavior, internal medicine, and holistic care.



A veterinary surgeon at work

Your Role at the Hospital

The attitude and abilities of the veterinary staff can make or break a practice just as easily as the behavior and knowledge of a veterinarian can. I believe that a well-informed, personable veterinary team member who can advise clients correctly is a true asset to every veterinary hospital, and this is what my course is all about.

You may be wondering what role everyone at the hospital has and how you can fit in. Let's look at each person and what they do.

The veterinarians are the ones who decide on patient care. This is what I do. Unless you are ready to go to university for many years, you won't become a James Herriot. For those of you who don't know who this fictional veterinarian is, I guess I'm dating myself. As you walk into a veterinary hospital, you'll see and speak to the receptionist. Her varied role includes setting appointments, admitting patients, doing billing and payments, and giving advice on animal health topics. There are short courses available at some colleges to learn these skills, but most receptionists are trained on the job.

The veterinary technologist (or technician) works directly with the patients. She might be pulling a blood or urine sample, taking a radiograph, watching a patient under anesthetic, assisting with a dental procedure, or doing minor surgery. She's gone through an intensive two-year college course. There are some distance education opportunities for "techs" now, but their availability depends on where you live.

The veterinary assistant is likely the one you want to know about. If you become one, your role is to assist anyone in the hospital who needs it. If the tech wants to take blood, how do you restrain the cat? If a dog neuter is the next surgery, what do you need to set up for it? How do you take a lateral radiograph of a cat's chest? What do you tell Mrs. Smith about the worms and fleas her dog has? Can you give advice on what to feed a geriatric cat?

I designed my courses to teach you how to assist in all these duties. When you're looking for a job, they'll give you an advantage over other applicants so that you can become employed at a veterinary hospital. I've also had many students who are already working with a veterinarian but they want to bolster their knowledge to do their job more effectively.

Some students wonder about veterinary assistant certification. There is an Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) designation provided by the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA). To get this, you need to attend a college that offers the programs. These programs are commonly associated with veterinary technician programs. The alternative is doing it through distance education if you're employed at a veterinary hospital, again through NAVTA.

If you don't live where you can take an AVA program, can't afford the time to attend classes, or don't work at a veterinary hospital, this is the alternative. I teach three six-week Veterinary Assistant courses and also a lengthier course (three to six months depending on how fast you do it), which are all available through your college. You can get information on these courses by checking the college website. I will provide links to more information on these courses at the end of Lesson 12 before we finish up this course.

Back to the Basics: Canine and Feline Reproduction

Since cats and dogs have become such important members of our families, participating in responsible animal reproduction is often part of the pet owning experience. Responsible breeding means that you have your animal checked out by a professional who can identify any defects in your animal that might be passed on to its offspring. If your pet suffers from hip dysplasia, poor eyesight, or any other number of genetic diseases, they should not be bred. Period.

Your next step as a responsible pet owner is to have your pet spayed so that these weaknesses aren't passed on. It may sound cruel, however, many of the genetic diseases found in the most popular breeds, like Golden Retrievers or German Shepherds, are a result of people breeding animals that are genetically imperfect. This can mean a lifetime of pain and illness for the animals and thousands of dollars in bills for the owner. Finally, it's also important to make sure you have enough loving families to send your puppies or kittens to. This will avoid unwanted pets that have to be euthanized or who go feral if they're released to fend for themselves.

With this information in mind, let's begin to look at some key glossary terms related to breeding.....