



INSIDE A VETERINARY HOSPITAL

Veterinary hospitals work a lot like human hospitals. Veterinarians (DVMs) are the doctors, registered veterinary technicians are similar to registered nurses, while everyone else is considered a DVM assistant. Most people know who the DVM is in a veterinary hospital, but sometimes consumers (even animal health professionals) may blur the lines between licensed and unlicensed staff. It's important for consumers to know who the licensed and unlicensed staff are and the roles they play in a pet's care. Here's an overview of who's who in veterinary health care from the California Veterinary Medical Board (VMB).

LICENSED STAFF

DVMs

DVMs alone are qualified to diagnose medical problems, prescribe therapies, and perform surgeries. They have completed veterinary school, passed both a national and state licensing examination, and passed a background check. Every veterinary premises must be registered with VMB and have a managing licensee (DVM) who is responsible for ensuring the facility and veterinary professionals providing services at the facility comply with all requirements under the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act and supporting regulations.

Tip: Veterinary licenses and veterinary premises registrations must be posted for public view at veterinary facilities.

Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVTs)

RVTs are skilled animal nursing professionals who have passed a national examination* and passed a background check. An RVT performs veterinary medical tasks under the direct or indirect supervision of a DVM.

Tip: Direct supervision means the DVM is present and is quickly available where the animal health care task is being performed. Indirect supervision means the DVM is not present but has given instructions for the animal's care.

Under direct supervision, an RVT may:

- (1) Induce anesthesia.
- (2) Perform dental extractions.
- (3) Suture cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, gingiva, and oral mucous membranes.
- (4) Create a relief hole in the skin to facilitate placement of an intravascular catheter.
- (5) Drug compounding from bulk substances.



Under indirect supervision, an RVT may:

- Operate radiographic equipment.
- Perform specific emergency lifesaving procedures.
- Administer medications, including controlled substances.
- Apply or change bandages.
- Draw blood and run lab tests.
- Drug compounding from non-bulk substances.

Like DVMs, RVTs must post their registration in the veterinary hospital in public view and carry the pocket version of their registration.

Veterinary Assistant Controlled Substances Permit (VACSP)

VACSP holders pass a background check and are authorized by VMB to handle and administer controlled substances at veterinary premises as directed by the licensed DVM.

Tip: While VACSP holders can administer controlled substances, only a DVM can prescribe medications.

Unlicensed Staff—Veterinary Assistants (VAs)

All unlicensed staff in a veterinary facility are considered veterinary assistants and may assist with supporting tasks under the direct or indirect supervision of a DVM or under the direct supervision of an RVT, but are not allowed to perform tasks restricted to DVMs, RVTs or VACSP holders. Unlicensed staff may not treat animals outside a hospital setting.

* Up until April 2013, RVTs were also required to pass a state examination. However, after determining all necessary clinical skills were covered in the national examination, VMB eliminated the state examination.

Tip: VAs may operate radiographic equipment, but only after completing specific training and only under direct supervision.

Veterinary Facilities

VMB is responsible for registering and inspecting veterinary premises where veterinary medicine is being practiced. By inspecting these facilities, VMB is ensuring that facilities are complying with the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act and supporting regulations for the health, safety, and welfare of California consumers and their pets.

THE VETERINARY MEDICAL BOARD

VMB is responsible for licensing DVMs, RVTs, VACSPs, and veterinary premises. VMB also is responsible for enforcing the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act and supporting regulations. VMB receives and investigates complaints submitted by consumers alleging veterinary professional misconduct. If warranted, VMB can take disciplinary action against the veterinary professional.

Laws and Regulations

DVMs and RVTs are responsible for knowing and following the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act. For more about the laws, regulations, policies, and legal opinions relating to veterinary care, visit www.vmb.ca.gov/laws_regs.

Consumers

As a California consumer, your role is to know the members of your pet's health care team, to ask questions, and to check licenses. It's also up to you to practice good preventative care for your pet, including regular checkups. Your pet depends on you!

If you are unhappy with the care your pet received, the conditions at the veterinary hospital, or other related matters, you should first discuss your concerns with your veterinarian. Many problems can be resolved at that level. If you are not satisfied, you may file a complaint with VMB.

APPLICABLE LAWS

Business and Professions Code (BPC) 4836.5.

The board shall take action pursuant to Article 4 (commencing with Section 4875) of this chapter against any veterinarian licensed or authorized to practice in this state who permits any registered veterinary technician or veterinary assistant to perform any animal health care services other than those allowed by this article.



BPC 4839.5.

No person shall use the title "registered veterinary technician" or "veterinary technician," or any other words, letters, or symbols, including, but not limited to, the abbreviation "R.V.T.," with the intent to represent that the person is authorized to act as a registered veterinary technician, unless that person meets the requirements of Section 4839.



To check a license or file a complaint,
visit www.breeze.ca.gov.