



# Top 5 “Housekeeping” Tips for New Grad Veterinarians





During your veterinary school years, the primary emphasis is on medicine. You spend the overwhelming majority of your vet school years

learning about normal animal physiology and countless disease states, going into greater medical detail than you could ever imagine.

When you enter “the real world” and start your first job, however, you might be surprised to learn how much of your mental space is occupied by job tasks that have absolutely

nothing to do with medicine. Sure, you need to know how to diagnose and treat your patients, but that’s often the easy part of being a vet! There are many other aspects of your job that may prove an even larger challenge, at least until you develop a good routine to help facilitate your work as a vet.

Use the following tips to help you keep the “housekeeping” side of veterinary medicine clear during your initial years as a practicing vet. Being organized and efficient is essential to allow you to devote adequate time to your patients and clients.

## 1. Develop a recordkeeping system that is both thorough and efficient.

As a vet student, you are probably accustomed to writing multi-page SOAP notes for each of your patients. Once you’re working as a new grad, seeing 20+ patients per day, the likelihood of you continuing to write such extensive medical records is extremely low! You may occasionally indulge in a detailed, lengthy write-up for a complicated case but, in general, you will need to develop a recordkeeping method that is both thorough and efficient.

If your practice uses electronic records, consider using templates for exams, wellness visit treatment plans, surgical notes, and anything else that is repetitive. Your practice may already have templates available, or you

may need to create your own. Even if setting up templates sounds time-consuming, it will probably save you time in the long run!

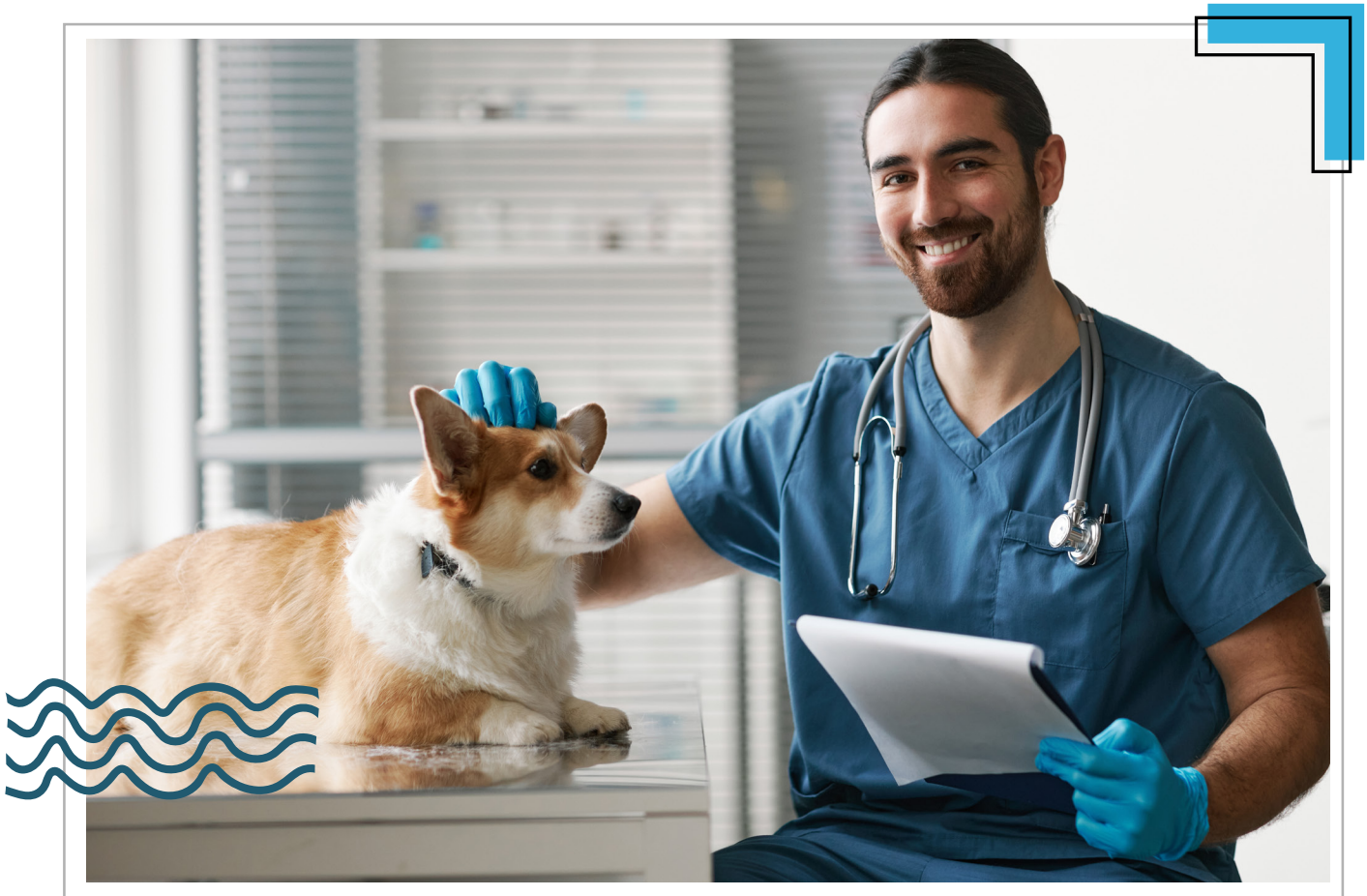
Also, decide whether you will write up your medical records between patients or at the end of the day. Many new grads wait until the end of the day to write their records, but this increases the likelihood of you forgetting something... and increases the likelihood that you will be at work late into the night! Consider writing up routine records between appointments and saving only “big cases” to be written up during lunch or at the end of the day. If you’re going to save a record for later in the day, be sure to jot down at least a few notes while the case is fresh in your mind.

*When you enter “the real world” and start your first job, however, you might be surprised to learn how much of your mental space is occupied by job tasks that have absolutely nothing to do with medicine.*

## 2. Work with your coworkers to ensure that charges are captured accurately.

Part of veterinary medicine is ensuring that everything is documented in your patient's medical record. Although you will document everything in your medical notes, entering services into your practice software is also essential, because that is how the client's charges are determined. Additionally, a discrepancy between your written record and the list of treatments/charges documented in the computer could put you at legal risk by generating confusion in the case of a board complaint.

Some practices have the vet enter charges for all services, others have the vet tech enter charges, and others have no set system but expect the vet and vet tech to work together to ensure that charges are entered correctly. Learn how the process of entering charges is handled in your practice and ensure that you are doing your part to check all charges before the pet is discharged.



### 3. Document controlled drug usage.

Practices have a variety of different ways of handling controlled drugs. In some practices, all of the controlled drugs are ordered under the practice owner's license and all veterinarians in the practice share the same controlled drug box. (You still need your own DEA license, though, in order to be able to prescribe controlled drugs to outside pharmacies.) In other practices, each veterinarian orders their own controlled drugs and has a separate drug box that only they can access. Regardless of how your practice stores controlled drugs, you will need to understand their system and abide by it,

ensuring that all controlled drugs that you use are appropriately documented.

Learn your practice's system for logging controlled drugs and log your controlled drug usage accordingly. Controlled drugs should also be inventoried on a regular basis (every one to three months is often recommended, although the DEA only requires inventory every two years). Talk to your hospital leadership to determine your role in this process and be prepared to contribute to controlled drug inventories as needed.

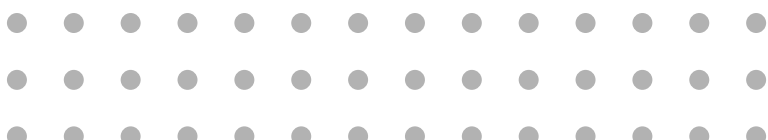
### 4. Learn and assess your practice's radiation safety protocols.

Hopefully, your first practice will correctly use radiology PPE (apron, gloves, and thyroid shield), dosimetry badges, and a radiology log. Take some time to familiarize yourself with your practice's approach and ensure that you understand your responsibilities. Do you need to store your dosimetry badge in a particular location to ensure that it's available for return when scheduled? Do you need to enter radiographic images in the radiology log, or is that your vet tech's responsibility? Is someone

on your team in charge of taking radiographs of your lead protective garments every 6-12 months, or do you need to head up that effort?

While radiation safety tasks are not necessarily complex or time-consuming, it's important to ensure that they are being handled by someone in your practice. If they aren't, talk to your managers and work to develop an appropriate radiation safety program for your practice.

*While radiation safety tasks are not necessarily complex or time-consuming, it's important to ensure that they are being handled by someone in your practice.*



## 5. Understand Safety Data Sheets and product labeling.

As a veterinarian, it's your responsibility to ensure that you are contributing to a safe work environment for your teammates. One important component of workplace safety is ensuring that chemicals are being handled in a safe manner. In many practices, disinfectants and other potentially-irritating chemicals are used with little regard for employee safety. Ensure this is not the case in your workplace!

Every chemical in your practice should have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS) that is available to all employees. Some practices have an online

SDS file, while other practices store these sheets in a binder.

Additionally, all products in your practice should have proper labeling. Chemicals that are stored in their original containers should already have all required labeling, but most practices tend to dispense small amounts of disinfectant, hydrogen peroxide, alcohol, and other substances into smaller storage bottles. If your practice does this, ensure that you are using secondary container labels to alert all employees to potential hazards.

### Summary

While veterinary school does an excellent job of teaching you the medical aspects of veterinary medicine, medical skills are just one component of veterinary medicine. The more aware you can be of all the non-medical "housekeeping" tasks that go into working as a veterinarian, the sooner you will be able to develop an efficient routine to manage these tasks, freeing up more time for your patients.



#### About the Author

Cathy Barnette is a freelance veterinary writer and contributor to Edcetera. She is a graduate of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine and spent 15 years working in small animal general practice before transitioning to a career in writing. Cathy is passionate about veterinary medicine and education; she enjoys working to provide valuable information to veterinarians, veterinary teams, and pet owners.