



Top 5 “Housekeeping” Tips for Vet Techs





As a vet tech student, your training focuses primarily on gaining the medical knowledge necessary to care for patients. You dedicate significant amounts of

time to normal animal physiology, anesthesia, pharmacology, and other subjects. However, when you're working in a veterinary clinic, those medical topics are only one area of emphasis. You will also spend a significant portion of your time handling those "housekeeping" tasks that are essential in veterinary medicine. By "housekeeping," I don't mean actual cleaning (although there will be plenty of that, too!) ... I'm referring to all of the paperwork and other

must-do items that are essential to keep a veterinary hospital running smoothly.

If you select a veterinary practice carefully, they will likely have systems in place to ensure that all of these tasks are handled in an effective and efficient manner. Your role will simply be to learn their protocols and remember to follow them. In some practices, though, things are a bit more chaotic and you may be on your own to determine the best way to get everything handled.

Follow these five tips to help you handle the "housekeeping" aspects of being a veterinary technician.

1. Develop a Routine to Accurately Capture Charges

During a typical veterinary visit, a patient often receives a large number of different services. For example, a dog that comes in for a wellness exam may receive a physical exam, a DAPP vaccine, a *Bordetella* vaccine, a rabies vaccine, a heartworm test, a fecal parasite exam, and wellness bloodwork (CBC/chem).

Not only do you need to ensure that all of these services are performed, you also need to ensure that they are documented in the patient's medical record. Most practices use practice management software, which allows you to enter all of the services performed. These services will then post to the patient's medical record and also be added to the client's bill for the day.

Practices have different strategies for ensuring that all charges are captured. In some practices, a vet tech enters all of the charges, and the vet is responsible for confirming the charges are entered correctly prior to discharge. In other practices, the vet tech enters some charges while the vet enters other charges.

Regardless of your practice's approach, it's important to learn what is expected of you and enter your share of charges consistently. If it's up to you to enter charges, ensure that you always enter them at the same time during a pet's visit, and recheck these charges prior to discharge.

Entering charges not only ensures that the client is billed appropriately, it also ensures that the pet's medical record is accurate.



2. Take Controlled Drug Usage Seriously

As a vet tech, you may have a role in your practice's controlled drug usage and documentation. While controlled drugs are typically accessible only to veterinarians, a number of practices also provide limited access to their vet techs. If you have access to your practice's controlled drugs during your shift, it's important to ensure that the box is always locked and that other individuals are not able to access it.

Any time you draw up an injection of a controlled substance or count out pills from the controlled drug box, your withdrawal should immediately be documented in your

practice's controlled drug log. This is essential, in order to ensure that the controlled drug log remains up to date and all drug usage can be accounted for.

Controlled drug boxes should be inventoried on a regular basis. Every one to three months is often recommended, although the DEA only requires inventory every two years. While this inventory is typically performed by the veterinarian who holds the box's DEA license, you may also have a role in the inventory process (counting drugs or acting as a witness to the inventory).

3. Follow Appropriate Radiation Safety Protocols

Hopefully, your first practice will correctly use recommended radiology PPE (apron, gloves, and thyroid shield), dosimetry badges, and a radiology log. Take some time to familiarize yourself with your practice's approach to radiation safety 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 document each radiograph in your practice's radiology log (required in some states but always

recommended)? 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. If your practice does not have a radiation safety officer who is proactively addressing radiation safety, consider whether that may be a role that you will be willing to take on.

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4. Understand Safety Data Sheets and Product Labeling

As a vet tech, it's your responsibility to ensure that you are contributing to a safe work environment. 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. Consult the SDS for any product that is new to you, in order to ensure that you understand recommended safety precautions.

Additionally, all products in your practice should have proper labeling. Chemicals that are stored in their original containers should already have required labels, but most practices 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.



5. Aid in the Management of Incoming and Outgoing Faxes and Emails

While an increasing number of paperwork tasks can be handled by email, old-fashioned fax machines still play a significant role in many practices. Each day, your practice will likely receive many incoming requests for prescription refills from human pharmacies as well as online pet pharmacies. Talk to your hospital leadership to determine how these incoming medication requests are handled. Some practices have one individual who handles all incoming prescription requests, while other practices have systems for dividing the work among vet techs. In most cases, incoming prescription requests are handled first by a vet tech, then passed along to a veterinarian if necessary.

Summary

Although your vet tech education has focused primarily on medical knowledge, being able to complete these essential “housekeeping” tasks is every bit as important to your career success. Your hospital cannot provide high-quality care to patients (and clients) if the hospital is in a constant state of chaos. As you begin your career, take the time to develop your awareness of these non-medical items and develop efficient systems to ensure that you don't forget any of these essentials.

On the outgoing side of things, specialist referrals are another source of paperwork in veterinary medicine. Some specialists will accept referral forms online, while others request that you fax a referral form and the patient's medical history. Specialty referrals are a relatively common occurrence in most veterinary practices. Unless your practice has one particular employee that handles all referrals (which is not the norm), you need to understand the process for referring a patient to your practice's preferred referral hospital and be able to make these referrals efficiently.



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.