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Healing and Saving Paws, Hooves, Scales, and Feathers: A Career as a Veterinarian

A dog casually sniffs its way out onto the street as its owner peacefully goes to check the mailbox. Suddenly, the screeching of tires is heard, and the owner of the pet is soon on the phone frantically speaking to the animal hospital through shaky sobs. A van comes for the dog, which is soon taken to the nearby animal hospital where it is treated and allowed to rest. The owner is relieved and no longer worried for his or her pet's life. This is the career of a veterinarian. I am researching a career as a veterinarian and exploring the education needed, the working conditions, and the duties and responsibilities for a career as a veterinarian. Veterinarians' daily jobs might seem to be just check-ups on household pets; however, this is not the case. A veterinarian can go into many different fields of work and medicine, such as a veterinarian working with smaller animals will work in a clinic where they would treat animals that are household pets, but still have the occasional emergency. On the other hand, a veterinarian working with large animals would either work at a ranch, a zoo, or maybe even as a meat and livestock inspector. However, some veterinarians might not even work with animals directly but use information from animals to help humans and the environment as well.

Becoming a veterinarian requires one to successfully complete specific educational training. Before a person even goes to veterinary school, he or she could start early training and

education to help them later on. While in high school, classes such as biology, physical sciences, and animal-related sciences will create a helpful starting point for the subjects that he or she will be taking in college. To help getting used to working with animals, a potential veterinarian could volunteer at a shelter where he or she could clean cages and feed animals. Working part time at a zoo or farm would also be very useful to help a person get used to a variety of animals. Studies for veterinary medicine are very important, but it is also beneficial to get used to animals' behaviors and actions one-on-one to help a person interested in being a veterinarian get accustomed to how it might be as an actual career and think about if they want to continue pursuing the career of a veterinarian.

A potential veterinarian is also required to study for two years of undergraduate courses for pre-veterinarian college classes. According to *Top 300 Careers*, the main subjects that he or she will study include many different classes of science and college math courses, and some schools will require literature and social sciences courses as well:

Preveterinary courses should emphasize the sciences. Veterinary medical colleges typically require applicants to have taken classes in organic and inorganic chemistry, physics, biochemistry, general biology, animal biology, animal nutrition, genetics, vertebrate embryology, cellular biology, microbiology, zoology, and systemic physiology. Some programs require calculus; some require only statistics, college algebra and trigonometry, or pre-calculus. Most veterinary medical colleges also require some courses in English or literature, other humanities, and the social sciences. Increasingly, courses in general business \

management and career development have become a standard part of the curriculum to teach new graduates how to effectively run a practice. (351)

Along with the many arduous math and science course one must take, general business management courses are also required to teach prospective veterinarians how to manage a practice.

After the two years of pre-veterinarian college classes, a prospective veterinarian can finally enter a veterinary medicine school. In spite of all the work, getting into a veterinary medicine college is difficult and includes much competition between candidates. In the United States, there are a total of twenty-eight schools for veterinary medicine, and not even half of the applicants are accepted. Although a bachelor's degree is not required, having one will increase the chance of getting accepted. After taking courses in subjects like anatomy, physiology, microbiology, pathology and surgery, a veterinarian candidate can finally earn his or her Doctorate of Veterinary Medicine.

Regardless of all the training and studying a prospective veterinarian has done up to this point, he or she is still not able to start practicing. He or she first must become licensed: "After earning a degree, the graduate must comply with the license regulations of the state in which he or she plans to practice" ("Veterinary Medicine" 346). To become licensed, he or she must pass the North American Veterinary Licensing Exam. This examination will test the potential veterinarian's knowledge in veterinary medicine. Some visual materials will also be included in the exam to test his or her ability to be able to diagnose illnesses of animals. In some states, there are additional examinations that must be passed to allow the candidate to become a licensed

veterinarian: “Most states also require candidates to pass a state jurisprudence examination covering state laws and regulations. Some states do additional testing on clinical competency as well” (“Veterinarians” 352). If all these exams are passed, the aspiring veterinarian is no longer just a candidate, but finally a full practicing veterinarian. In the end, a career as a veterinarian requires a large amount of education.

To add, the working conditions of a veterinarian differ depending on which field of work one enters. For example, a small-animal veterinarian’s working conditions vary greatly from that of a ranch veterinarian. A small-animal veterinarian works mostly with household pets, some of the more common ones are dogs, cats, rabbits, and birds. This type of veterinarian is the kind that is a town’s local vet. He or she will have a clean, indoor area to work in and a variety of medical instruments which can be used whenever needed. The veterinarian will also try to keep regular hours: “Sometimes they provide emergency house calls, but most try to keep normal business hours. A number of doctors may work as many as 60 hours a week if emergency health problems occur” (“Veterinarians” 138). However, he or she will sometimes have to attend to emergency calls at odd hours if there is a urgent situation in which a pet needs immediate medical attention.

Also, a ranch veterinarian works with farm animals, the bulk of which being horses and cattle. Unless he or she live on the farm or ranch that he or she is working on, a ranch veterinarian will have to drive from his or her home or office to the farm or ranch. A ranch veterinarian’s working conditions are not the most hygienic for most of the time he or she works in unclean conditions outside: “Veterinarians who work with food animals or horses spend time driving between their offices and farms or ranches. They work outdoors in all kinds of weather

and may have to treat animals or perform surgery, often under unsanitary conditions” (“Veterinarians” 3). Unless a ranch veterinarian is performing his or her tasks in a barn, he or she is usually outdoors to take care of the animals. If an emergency situation occurs, such as a horse that has fallen from colic and can not be moved, surgery will have to be carried out on the spot no matter the surroundings.

Additionally, a zoo veterinarian has the widest variety of animals that any veterinarian would work with. This type of veterinarian has to know all of a zoo’s residents and decide what is best for each individual animal. Many zoos have a veterinarian work full time at the zoo to make sure all of the animals’ health is taken care of. Most animals will have their check-ups done in their exhibits. When intensive care or surgery is involved depending on the severeness of the illness or wound and the size of the animal, an animal may need to be moved to a private room where it can be treated on and get the proper attention it needs. These rooms are hygienic and filled with medical tools that will allow the veterinarian to be able to perform emergency care to the injured animal.

Moreover, a meat and livestock inspector veterinarian works only with animals that are going to become food products, such as cattle and chickens, or inspecting meat that is going to be sold in stores. The veterinarian will have to make trips from their office and travel to the ranch whenever need be. Like the ranch vet, if the meat and livestock inspector veterinarian is checking on the animals, the conditions may be unsanitary and in any kind of weather, especially when performing emergency treatments. However, if the veterinarian is currently inspecting the meat, he or she will be indoors in a processing company.

Also, a veterinarian working in environmental health will work with people more than animals. This type of veterinarian will work in an office or possibly a laboratory. These kinds of working conditions are extremely clean, very well-lit, and have many different kinds of equipment to be used for different types of environmental studies.

Likewise, a veterinarian working in a pharmaceutical company will also work alongside people instead of with animals. The working conditions are working in a bright, very clean laboratory or office where research equipment is nearby and easily accessible. Since these veterinarians are using information from animals, they rarely work outside of the laboratory. Thus, a veterinarian will have different working conditions depending on which field of work he or she enters.

In addition, there are specific duties and responsibilities that a veterinarian must perform. However, the duties and responsibilities of a veterinarian relies on what field of medicine and work he or she enters. A small-animal veterinarian's daily routine will usually consist of check-ups on household pets. This will include just regular inspection of the pet to make sure it is healthy. Pills such as the ones for heart worm are regular and need to be given to most pets once a month. Specific shots and vaccines are required for certain animals, such as rabies, and also are regular for pets annually. Older pets may need special vitamins to allow them to be more comfortable. If during a check-up the veterinarian diagnoses the pet with an illness, he or she will try to treat it and possibly give the owner of the pet medication which will help the animal. Although many days in a small-animal veterinary clinic might be peaceful, there are also times when there are more serious problems. Animals coming in with severe illnesses, a harsh

wound, a broken bone, or even an internal problem are not necessarily rare occurrences in a veterinarian's office. A veterinarian must also be able to board sick animals when they need to be kept overnight. Some veterinary clinics also house healthy pets if a owner is away on vacation.

Occasionally, a veterinarian might have to perform surgery on the animal, such as a shattered bone. There is also the infrequent occurrence when a pet might have to be put down. Veterinarians will euthanize an animal if it is very old or is in extreme pain and can not be treated. Along with working with pets, another essential skill that small-animal veterinarians must have is to be able to talk to the pets' owners: "Most veterinarians diagnose animal health problems, vaccinate against diseases, medicate animals suffering from infections or illnesses, treat and dress wounds, set fractures, perform surgery, and advise owners about animal feeding, behavior, and breeding" ("Veterinarians" 2). They must be able to advice and convince owners what is best for their pet, including feeding, medication, and possible surgery.

Veterinarians also must be able to help owners emotionally. If a pet is hurt or wounded, the owner is naturally worried. If a veterinarian has to put an animal down, one first has to ask the owner, which in some cases can be extremely hard. An owner does not want to part with his or her beloved pet, so a veterinarian must be able to convince them what is best and console a owner if he or she get extremely emotional over his or her pet.

On the other hand, the duties and responsibilities of a ranch veterinarian vary from that of a small-animal veterinarian. A ranch veterinarian will work with farm animals instead of pets. A ranch veterinarian also have to do regular check-ups on the animals. They will have to check for any illnesses and treat them. Since many animals at ranches are kept close together a disease

could spread very quickly which is why ranch animals must also get regular vaccines to keep any reoccurring illnesses away. A ranch veterinarian will also work with humans. They usually talk to the farm or ranch owners about the feeding and housing of the animals to make sure there are no health issues. Ranch animals can also have cases where surgery may be required. If there is a open wound on the animal, it must be treated and dressed as quickly as possible, for many ranch animals stay outside more often than indoors. If the wound is very deep or extreme the animal may have to be kept in a quarantined stall for as long as it takes the wound to heal. There is also the occurrence where a veterinarian may have to help a birthing animal. In some cases, a cesarean section may have to be performed on the animal.

A zoo veterinarian works with a very wide variety of animals and therefore has many different duties and responsibilities. This type of veterinarian must be able to work with all different species of animals since he or she has such a broad selection of animals one must take care of: “Most zoos also employ a full-time veterinarian to coordinate the health care, feeding, and treatment of the entire animal population” (“Veterinarians” 138). A zoo veterinarian will also carry out regular check-ups on all of the animals living at the zoo. These check-ups are very similar to the ones for any other animal where the veterinarian will just check for any illnesses or wounds. A zoo veterinarian must also know the behavior of each individual animal to know when something is wrong with that animal. When he or she notice it acting out of its normal behavior, one will do a check-up to see if anything is wrong. If an illness is found, then one will treat it. If the illness is more severe than normal, then the animal will have to be quarantined and have more attention placed on its care. Zoo animals must also be vaccinated. Many zoo animals

come from the wild and can carry many different diseases, some which can harm humans and some that can harm other animals. A zoo veterinarian also has to regulate each animal's feeding. He or she has to make sure each animal is getting the right amount of nutrients and food just like it would in the wild. Sometimes when an animal is giving birth, a zoo veterinarian will help it to make sure all of the newborn animals are safe and help the chances of each one's survival.

Furthermore, there are meat and livestock inspector veterinarians who also have their own duties and responsibilities. These veterinarians have to take care of the health of all of the food animals to make sure that they are in good health to be able to become food. Meat and livestock inspector veterinarians also do check-ups on the animals. They check for any illnesses or signs of disease that could harm that could harm the other animals or the meat. Since animals that are meant to be food are kept very close together, any disease could spread fast, and cause all of the meat that was going to be used to go to waste. Veterinarians must also inspect carcasses for any sign of disease to try and find out what it is and make sure that none of the live animals have it.

Also, if a animal is giving birth, the veterinarian will help the animal to make sure everything is fine and goes smoothly. Sometimes a cesarean section might have to be performed on the birthing animal. Meat and livestock veterinarians must also check the meat that has already been produced to make sure that there are no diseases in the meat. If there are, all that meat must be thrown away and the farm at which the meat came from must also go through an inspection. These veterinarian must also talk to the farm owners about how the animals' accommodations are and the food they are fed. They must also ask about animal production to

make sure all government regulations are being met: “Veterinarians who are meat, poultry, or egg product inspectors examine slaughtering and processing plants, check live animals and carcasses for disease, and enforce government regulations regarding food purity and sanitation” (“Veterinarians” 2). Meat and livestock veterinarians are the ones who are making sure processed foods that come from animals are safe for consumers to eat.

Despite the popular belief that many people believe that all veterinarians work with animals, this is not always the case. Even though there are few, one type of veterinarian that does not work with animals, but works in environmental health. These veterinarians study pesticides and pollution and the impact they leave on both animals and people. A veterinarian working in environmental health try to help the public’s wellness by analyzing some environment hazards such as the effects chemical pollution leaves on the land and water: “Veterinarians working in environmental health study the effects of pesticides and pollution on animals and people” (“Veterinary Medicine” 345). These veterinarians have to study the effects these threats leave on both humans and animals, so they have more information on how to improve the environment’s health.

Another type of veterinarian that does not work with animals works in pharmaceutical companies. These veterinarians use information from animals to advance in human medicine and create vaccines that can contribute to human illnesses. A veterinarian working in a pharmaceutical company will take information from animal diseases to help further human-related medicine: “A number of veterinarians work with physicians and scientists as they research ways to prevent and treat various human health problems” (“Veterinarians” 2).

Veterinarians that find cures for animal illnesses help scientists develop medicine for humans.

Therefore, particular duties and responsibilities are required for veterinarians.

To conclude, after thoroughly researching a career as a veterinarian, I believe I have found the career I am interested in pursuing. Although I am not entirely sure which field of work I would like to enter, I would much rather work with animals than in an office. Even though years of education are needed, I believe it is a job I would become very fond of. I have always loved animals and always thought being a veterinarian would mean being able to cure a simple illness found in one's beloved pet, however I have now learned that there is so much more to being a veterinarian no matter what field of work you enter. Because of this, I am even more ready to learn what I need to know about the health and care of animals and how to become a successful veterinarian that can make a difference in the world of veterinary medicine. So, in fifteen years, you may find me in a veterinarian's office taking care of a simple illness to a dog, roaming on a ranch for check-ups to a herd of cattle, or possibly in a zoo taking care of a variety of exotic animals.

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