Veterinary Nurse

Introduction

As a Veterinary Nurse, you will care for animals that are having veterinary treatment. You will help veterinary surgeons (vets) to diagnose and treat illnesses and injuries. Duties include giving advice to owners on animal care, preparing instruments, taking X-rays and doing laboratory tests. They might also have some clerical duties, eg, booking appointments and filing records.

Also known as

• Nurse, Veterinary

Work Activities

As a Veterinary Nurse you will support the vet's work in the clinic. Working closely with the vet, you'll plan and deliver care for the animals. This includes monitoring the animal’s condition, giving medicines and other therapies, feeding, ensuring comfort and hygiene, and keeping careful records.

You will also do technical work such as managing the operating theatre during surgery. For example, before an operation, you'll set up the operating theatre, sterilise and set out instruments, and prepare the animal, for example, by clipping and cleansing the area that the vet will treat or operate on.

During an operation, you will hand instruments to the vet, check the animal's reaction to the anaesthetic and monitor its progress. After treatment or surgery, you will tidy up and clear away equipment.

You will also give advice and guidance to owners. You'll play an important role in educating owners about how best to care for their animals.

Other duties include:

• testing blood and urine samples to help in diagnosis
• looking after drugs and equipment, ordering new stock when needed
• taking and developing X-rays
• helping to ‘put down’ animals that are too sick to be treated, and supporting their owners

You are also able to give some treatments and to perform minor surgical procedures, under the vet's direction. You can change dressings and give medicines to the animals, for example.

Most veterinary practices employ full-time receptionists. However, you may be expected to cover clerical duties such as answering the telephone, booking appointments, and updating and filing records.

Speaking to people on the phone and welcoming them to the practice gives you the opportunity to reassure anxious animal owners.

Veterinary Nurses usually work with small, domestic pets. However, you may also qualify to work with horses (equine practice). Depending on where the practice is, you could also be working with livestock or zoo animals.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you’re looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To be a veterinary nurse, you'll need:

• a love of animals and concern for their welfare
- emotional strength, and you must not be squeamish. You can be working with very sick animals, and you might have to help the vet 'put down' animals
- communication skills to work with other staff and the public. This includes the ability to explain things clearly and to reassure anxious owners
- to be able to plan and prioritise work
- attention to detail
- to be sympathetic, caring and approachable
- practical hand skills, for example, to give injections and safely restrain animals
- physical fitness; this is an active job

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting: £17,000 - £19,000
- With experience: £20,000 - £22,000
- Senior Veterinary Nurses earn £23,000

Hours of work

As a Veterinary Nurse you can expect to work around 40 hours a week, which might include weekend work and on-call duties. Part-time and temporary posts are available.

Where could I work?

You will work in veterinary practices. There are also opportunities with animal welfare organisations such as the People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), the Blue Cross and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA).

Other employers include veterinary schools, research establishments, zoos, animal laboratories, pharmaceutical and pet nutrition companies and colleges (veterinary nurse education).

Opportunities for veterinary nurses occur in towns, cities and rural areas throughout the UK.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Vacancies are advertised in local newspapers, at Jobcentre Plus, on the Find a Job website, on job boards (general job boards and those specifically for veterinary jobs), and on veterinary employment agency websites.

GreenJobs is a job board aimed at people interested in green careers:

www.greenjobs.co.uk/browse-jobs/animal-jobs/

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

There are two routes for you to take in order to become a qualified Veterinary Nurse:

- on-the job training - such as an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship which leads towards a vocational qualification such as a level 3 diploma in veterinary nursing
- the higher education route - this involves doing a degree or foundation degree in veterinary nursing that is approved by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.
Work Experience

If you don’t have the usual minimum academic entry requirements for training, you might be able to start work as an Animal Nursing Assistant.

Training

If you would like some more training, there is a City & Guilds level 3 qualification in Veterinary Nursing. This course has a range of units and takes around 2 years to complete. The units that you could be studying include:

- infection control
- understanding the essentials of vet nursing care for hospitalised animals
- applied animal welfare, health and husbandry for vet nurses
- essentials of practical nursing care for hospitalised animals
- veterinary nursing support of diagnostic imaging
- supporting veterinary operating theatre practice
- supply of vet medicines
- vet support for small animals
- practical nursing support

Other courses could be available in your area.

If you follow the apprentice-style training route, you must make sure that you are starting work in a TP that is approved by the RCVS. You’ll find a list of approved TPs on the RCVS website.

The other possible entry route is after completing a degree or foundation degree in veterinary nursing that is approved by the RCVS. You can find a list of approved courses on the RCVS website. University students take (usually unpaid) work experience placements in TPs.

Progression

Qualified Veterinary Nurses can go on to specialise in a particular area, such as equine care. In larger practices that employ several Nurses, you might be able to progress to a Head Nurse or Practice Manager. Veterinary Nurses can also move into areas such as teaching or lecturing, and the veterinary supply and pharmaceutical industries.

Qualifications

To get onto an Intermediate or Advanced Level Apprenticeship, you’ll usually need five GCSEs at grade C/4 or above, possibly including English and maths.

To start training as an employed student in an approved Training Practice (TP), you must have at least 5 GCSEs (A*-C 9-4), including English language, maths and a science subject.

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) accepts a number of equivalent qualifications. You should contact your local Veterinary Nursing Approved Centre (VNAC) to check whether your qualifications are acceptable. VNACs provide training and assessment through local TPs. You can find a list of VNACs on the RCVS website.

People who hold the level 2 certificate for Animal Nursing Assistants can also enter veterinary nurse apprentice-style training. They will also need GCSEs (A*-C 9-4) in English (or a level 2 Key Skills qualification in communication/level 2 English Functional Skills) and maths (or Key Skills level 2 in application of number/level 2 maths Functional Skills).

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Skills/experience

If you don’t have the usual minimum academic entry requirements for training, you might be able to start work as an
animal nursing assistant.

To train towards the Level 2 Certificate for Animal Nursing Assistants (ANA), you must usually be working either full- or part-time in a veterinary practice. Practical training towards the ANA qualification will usually be supported by a college-based course or studying by distance learning.

Training takes one year to complete. You can enter veterinary nursing training with the ANA qualification if you also have GCSEs (A*-C) in English (or a level 2 Key Skills qualification in Communication/level 2 English Functional Skills) and Maths (or Key Skills level 2 in Application of Number/level 2 Maths Functional Skills).

Courses

Some entrants have developed relevant skills and knowledge through experience with animals, for example, with the RSPCA, People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), on a farm, or in a stable or cattery.

If you don't have the qualifications you need to enter a degree or foundation degree course, you might be able to start one after completing an Access course. You don't usually need any qualifications to start an Access course, although you should check individual course details.

Statistics

- 16% of people in occupations such as veterinary nursing work part-time.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Lantra**
  Skills for land-based and environmental industries
  Address: Lantra House, Stoneleigh Park, Coventry, Warwickshire CV8 2LG
  Tel: 02476 696996
  Email: reception@lantra.co.uk
  Website: [www.lantra.co.uk](http://www.lantra.co.uk)

- **GreenJobs**
  Email: info@greenjobs.co.uk
  Website: [www.greenjobs.co.uk](http://www.greenjobs.co.uk)

- **Belfast Metropolitan College**
  Irish enquiries
  Tel: 028 9026 5265
  Email: admissions@belfastmet.ac.uk
  Website: [www.belfastmet.ac.uk](http://www.belfastmet.ac.uk)

- **College of Agriculture, Food & Rural Enterprise (CAFRE)**
  Irish enquiries
  Tel: 0800 0284291
  Email: enquiries@cafre.ac.uk
  Website: [www.cafre.ac.uk](http://www.cafre.ac.uk)

- **People's Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA)**
  Address: Whitechapel Way, Priorslee, Telford, Shropshire TF2 9PQ
  Tel: 01952 290999
  Website: [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)

- **Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)**
  Address: Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF
  Tel: 020 7222 2001
  Email: info@rcvs.org.uk
  Website: [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk)

- **Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)**
Address: Wilberforce Way, Southwater, Horsham, West Sussex RH13 9RS
Website: www.rspca.org.uk

- **Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI)**
  Irish enquiries
  Address: 53 Lansdowne Road, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4
  Tel: 01 6684402
  Email: info@vci.ie
  Website: www.vci.ie

- **Veterinary Record**
  Publisher: British Veterinary Association (BVA)
  Website: veterinaryrecord.bmj.com

- **Careers Wales - Welsh Apprenticeships**
  Tel: 0800 028 4844
  Website: ams.careerswales.com/

- **British Veterinary Nursing Association**
  Tel: 01279 408644
  Email: bvna@bvna.co.uk
  Website: www.bvna.org.uk/

**Related Careers**
- Animal Technologist
- Dog Groomer
- Gamekeeper
- Kennel Assistant
- Assistance Dog Trainer
- Pet Behaviour Counsellor
- Horse Groom
- Veterinary Surgeon
- Zoo Keeper
- RSPCA Inspector
- Dog Handler
- Animal Caretaker
- Animal Nutritionist