

## **QUALIFIED VETERINARY ASSISTANT or VA VETERINARY NURSE or VN**

### **DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES**

#### **Professional context for the positions of VA and VN**

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Qualified veterinary assistants (VAs) and veterinary nurses (VNs) assist veterinary surgeons practising in veterinary surgeries, clinics or animal hospitals, at the workplace or home of animal owners. They are salaried by the independent veterinary surgeon (or by a practice of independent veterinary surgeons), or more occasionally they are unpaid spouses. Their work is always under the responsibility of the veterinary surgeon and accomplished within the framework determined by him.

#### **Characteristics of VA and VN posts**

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More often than not, VAs and VNs work in small practices with a team composed of an average of between 1 and 4 employees.

VAs' and VNs' work covers several types of activity in the following areas:

- customer relations
- help with running the veterinary practice
- hygiene and safety
- technical assistance for the veterinary surgeon in animal care.

There are however differences in the types of tasks and responsibilities entrusted to VAs and VNs

Veterinary Assistants carry out mostly activities defined as general procedures within the profession or activities specific to their employer, with a limited degree of autonomy: customer reception and information, basic secretarial work and orders, application of hygiene and safety rules, animal restraint and preparation of specified equipment. In the case of other tasks which they may occasionally be asked to carry out, they refer directly to the veterinary surgeon's instructions.

Veterinary assistant is a professional title awarded jointly by the CPNE and the CNFA, and applies to grade 4 jobs according to the national charter of veterinary practices, clinics and hospitals.

Veterinary Nurses have more responsibility delegated to them by the veterinary surgeon. VNs are responsible for the same tasks as VAs as well as activities requiring the capacity for autonomy, analysis and synthesis: customer advice in the area of animal health and well-reasoned sales of non-regulated products, schedule management, files and communication aids, help with treatment and further tests, assisting at with surgery

In addition, VNs may be entrusted with specific activities according to the type of clientele and structure of their veterinary practices:

- either pets only
- or a mixed practice with pets and farm animals and/or horses
- or more rarely horses and rural animals only.

Some practitioners may also entrust VNs with the responsibility of some aspects of accounting. Veterinary Nurse applies to grade 5 jobs according to national charter of veterinary practices, clinics and hospitals. Furthermore, the code of veterinary professional ethics specifies that a veterinary hospital must employ at least one VN.

### **Specific requirements for the employment of VAs and VNs**

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From an ethical point of view, the work of VAs and VNs must be carried out in compliance with the regulations incumbent on veterinary surgeons failing which the surgeon has full professional liability. They must therefore exercise confidentiality at all times.

From a legislative point of view, the practice of medicine and surgery on animals is strictly reserved for veterinary surgeons. Diagnosis, interpreting test results, prescription, certification, anaesthesia and surgery are therefore not to be entrusted to VAs or VNs. If they were to practice these acts, they would themselves be fully liable for illegal practice. Treatment and care given will be done so on the request and under the control of the veterinary surgeon, who must be in a position to intervene at all times.

It is the VAs' and VNs' responsibility to comply strictly with the limits of their role, and to refer immediately to the veterinary practitioner in all situations which require his direct authority

From the point of view of customer relations, VAs and VNs are systematically in direct contact with customers to represent the veterinary surgeon. In this respect, they have a great deal of responsibility for a client's first impressions and the image of the practice or clinic. It is for this reason they must respect the requirements of professional reception by having a tidy appearance and a pleasant and respectful demeanour towards customers.

From the point of view of safety, VAs and VNs are exposed to specific risks from:

- contact with animals: bites, scratches, contagious zoonoses
- contact with sharp medical waste
- exposure to ionizing rays
- handling corrosive, toxic or inflammable products used for certain acts or to preserve samples
- handling certain dangerous equipment or instruments

Anti-tetanus and BCG vaccinations are therefore strongly recommended.

Compliance with safety regulations and use of x-ray protective equipment are mandatory otherwise the employer is fully liable. VAs and VNs must also take care to protect customers against these risks.

### **Entry requirements for the employment of VAs and VNs**

The position of VA or VN may be occupied by men or women, who have relationship skills, easy contact with animals and adaptability to the diversity of work situations. In addition to these, the position of VN requires skills in organisation and autonomy.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of medical contraindications for the exercise of the profession of VA or VN: allergies to animal hair, incapacity to remain standing for a prolonged length of time, inability to carry heavy loads, significantly impaired vision or hearing, some physical handicaps, psychiatric conditions...

## **Qualification requirements**

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The professional qualification of Veterinary Assistant (grade 4) can be obtained by:

- a one-year contract or period of professional apprenticeship with 245 hours of day release study
- Work Experience Validation, after at least three years of work experience as a grade 3 veterinary assistant.

The approved title of 'Auxiliaire Spécialisé Vétérinaire' (Veterinary Nurse – grade 5) can be obtained by:

- a 2 year contract or period of apprenticeship with 635 hours of day release study (reduced to one year and 390 hours of study for qualified Veterinary Assistants)
- Work Experience Validation, after at least three years work experience as a qualified grade 4 veterinary assistant