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Dennis Lopez, M.Ed., BS, LVT, NAVTA’s President

2013 Convention Issue
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You Are NAVTA!

The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America is excited to present to you the 2013 Convention issue of The NAVTA Journal. This issue serves as a sample of our bi-monthly publication that is sent to all active NAVTA members. In each issue of The NAVTA Journal, members will find three continuing education articles; a case study; updates from state, specialty, and SCNAVTA chapters; and member profiles. If you are interested in receiving each issue of The NAVTA Journal, fill out and return the membership application included in this issue or our online application on www.navta.net.

Who are NAVTA members?

The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTAN) is made up of people just like you... people who want to make a difference in the lives of animals. NAVTA is a growing global network of:

- Credentialed Technicians
- Veterinary Technician Specialists
- Assistants
- Veterinarians
- Practice Managers
- Educators
- Researchers
- Industry Sales
- Allied Industry
- Students

NAVTA empowers you to succeed in your career. Together, we strengthen the veterinary technician profession.

Why NAVTA?

NAVTA is a membership-based non-profit association that acts as the national voice of the veterinary technician profession. In addition to serving its members, NAVTA educates the allied industry and the general public about the veterinary healthcare team. NAVTA initiatives include:

- Monitoring legislation that affects the veterinary technician profession on a national level
- Continuing education and networking through state and local networks [and student chapters]
- Celebrating National Veterinary Technician Week
- Strengthening relationships with allied associations and NAVTA sponsors
- Distributing technician demographic and salary surveys
- Creating ongoing public relations campaign about the importance of credentialed technicians

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Do you have experience in a particular disease or procedure? Have you participated in an interesting case that could be a learning experience for others? Do you have special expertise that you’d like to share with your fellow NAVTA members? No matter the subject, we would love to include your articles and photos in The NAVTA Journal. Each bimonthly journal contains general editorial articles and three Continuing Education articles that can be used to earn CE credits.

Guidelines for CE articles
- 2500-3000 words
- 10 multiple choice questions and answers for CE quiz
- minimum of two references
- cannot have been published in any other trade publication
- authors must have recognized expertise in subject matter

Case Study
On occasion, a Case Study will be included in the issue. The Case Study depicts an unusual or extraordinary case that a veterinary technician was involved with.

Guidelines for Case Studies
- 600-750 words, depending on number of photos
- photos must be used to illustrate points
- technical information on symptoms, laboratory tests, surgery and outcomes must be included with the study

Photo Guidelines
- minimum of 300 dpi
- digital photos only
- accepted file formats include: pdf, jpg, tif or eps (photos cannot be embedded in an email or another document file)

Visit: www.navta.net for full editorial guidelines.
President's Message

Thank you for picking up this special conference edition of The NAVTA Journal of the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) and welcome to the conference.

If you are a credentialed veterinary technician (certified, licensed, or registered), your attendance at this conference reflects not only your desire to obtain continuing education credits, but demonstrates a commitment to lifelong learning. On behalf of NAVTA, I applaud your efforts. Veterinary medicine is a constantly changing profession and the veterinary technician must stay current with new technologies and a dedication to provide better medicine. As technicians are aware, the implementation of excellent patient care requires the knowledge and expertise of an informed, professional nursing staff.

For more than 20 years, NAVTA has been the national voice of credentialed veterinary technicians and fully supports state mandated requirements for continuing education. The mission of NAVTA: “To represent and promote the profession of veterinary technology. NAVTA provides direction, education, support, and coordination for its members and works with other allied professional organizations for the competent care and humane treatment of animals.” In keeping with this mission, one of NAVTA’s main goals is to standardize the credentialing of veterinary technicians and to encourage state veterinary boards and veterinary associations to embrace the profession with requirements for certification, licensure, and continuing education. Veterinary technicians have worked hard to achieve their status, through the educational process and through years of practice. Veterinary technicians have earned the right to wear their credentials as a leader of the veterinary nursing team.

However, not only is it important for the veterinary technician to increase their own knowledge through continuing education; the technician should be a leader in sharing new techniques and protocols with their home clinic staff. I firmly believe technicians should be at the forefront of many aspects of client education including nutrition, neonatal care, and behavior training and modification. Technicians should be the clinic resident experts on laboratory procedures and new techniques in radiography. And ultimately, technicians should be the master trainers in the clinic sharing skills learned in the continuing education classroom and live, hands-on labs with all the nursing and support staff.

Have a great time at the conference: learn, practice, network, and meet new friends and professional colleagues. And don’t forget to take some relaxing time with special dinners and events.

Best wishes,

Dennis Lopez, M.Ed., B.Sci., LVT
NAVTA President
Benefits of Becoming a Veterinary Technician Specialist

Liza W. Rudolph, LVT, VTS (CP – Canine/Feline)

Abstract
Project Statement
Opportunities for veterinary technicians continue to increase dramatically in the profession. One option for professional development is to obtain Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS) recognition. Technicians that pursue a VTS demonstrate the potential for increased personal professional growth, but it was unclear what additional benefits may be obtained.

Motivation
By identifying and analyzing the benefits received by current VTS, credentialed veterinary technicians (CVTs) may be encouraged to pursue specialty recognition within their area of expertise.

Methodology
A survey was designed and delivered to CVTs on a national level in order to ascertain the benefits available to veterinary technicians (VTS and non-VTS). This distribution was facilitated by state and local veterinary technician organizations, current VTS academies, St. Petersburg College Veterinary Technician Program, veterinary technician social networking sites (Linked-In and Facebook), and personal networking opportunities of the researcher.

Results
Based on data analysis, VTS report increased benefits in comparison to their CVT counterparts. VTS receive more vacation time, higher CE allotment, and greater time off for CE. When benefits such as health insurance, discounted pet care, paid overtime, etc. were combined and correlated with experience, it was found that VTS technicians with between 1 and 20 years-experience consistently received more overall benefits versus their CVT counterparts. Most VTS participants received a pay increase when VTS status was conferred. VTS are more likely to have lecture experience and when they lecture, they are more likely to be compensated for their time. The majority of VTS report an increase in recognition/respect and job satisfaction as a direct result of VTS achievement.
Conclusions
Veterinary technicians seeking an increase in recognition/respect, job satisfaction, and overall benefits may pursue VTS recognition as a viable method to achieving personal professional growth.

Introduction
The current educational standard for credentialed veterinary technicians in the United States is an Associate’s degree in veterinary technology. One way veterinary technicians can pursue professional growth beyond this benchmark is by obtaining VTS recognition. Although personal satisfaction is often the primary motivation for obtaining this distinction, there are likely additional benefits. This research project was designed to identify and analyze the additional benefits a VTS may have. The problem statement will precede the literature review of this paper and will be followed by the research methodology, results and data analysis, discussion, and conclusion.

Problem Statement
Opportunities for veterinary technicians have increased dramatically in the profession. One option for professional growth is to obtain Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS) recognition. Technicians that pursue a VTS demonstrate the potential for increased personal professional growth, but it was unclear what additional benefits may be obtained. The goal of this Capstone project is to identify the benefits to technicians attaining VTS status.

The following literature review will include a brief history of veterinary technology in the United States with a particular emphasis on VTS development. VTS requirements will be examined, previous demographic survey information, reported earnings of CVTs and VTSs have increased dramatically in the profession.

History
In order to bring some perspective, a brief history of veterinary technology in the United States will be discussed. The first animal technician program was established at the State University of New York (SUNY) in 1961 and in 1967 the Veterinary Medical Association of Maryland became the first state to test and register veterinary paraprofessionals (McCurnin & Basset, 2005). There are currently 191 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) approved veterinary technology programs across 46 states, 21 of which offer a four-year degree, and 9 offer distance learning programs (AVMA, 2012). Although the number of veterinary technology programs has been consistently growing, fewer than 3,800 graduate from these programs annually (Rose, 2010).

Veterinary Technician Specialties
In 1981 NAVTA, then called the North American Veterinary Technician Association, was founded. This organization created a Committee of Veterinary Technician Specialties (CVTS) in 1995 in order to provide guidelines and reviews those organizations interested in the formation of a specialty academy (Rose, 2010). The first specialty in veterinary technology, the Academy of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT), was granted provisional recognition by NAVTA in 1996 (NAVTA, 2012) (Kerr, 2008).

Since that time, ten more VTS academies have been recognized by NAVTA (now known as the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America). The current recognized VTS academies are as follows:
- 1996 – Academy of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT)
- 1998 – Academy of Veterinary Technicians Anesthetists (AVTA)
- 2002 – Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT)
- 2006 – Academy of Internal Medicine Veterinary Technicians (AIMVT)
- 2008 – Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (AVBT)
- 2009 – Academy of Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians (AEVNT)
- 2009 – Academy of Veterinary Zoological Medicine Technicians (AVZMT)
- 2010 – Academy of Veterinary Surgical Technicians (AVST)
- 2010 – Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Clinical Practice (AVTCP)
- 2011 – Academy of Veterinary Nutrition Technicians (AVNT)
- 2011 – Academy of Veterinary Clinical Pathology Technicians (AVCPT) (NAVTA, 2011)

VTS Requirements
A NAVTA approved specialty academy recognizes credentialed veterinary technicians who must complete a formal process of education, training, experience, and examination (NAVTA, 2012). The requirements from each academy vary, but most require between three to five years’ experience as a credentialed veterinary technician, 25 to 40 hours of appropriate continuing education, completed skills and/or knowledge lists, case logs, case reports, and letters of recommendation. Some VTS academies have specialized research versus clinical tracks, while others have mentorship programs for candidates in place.

Demographics
Veterinary Technology Specialty academies may be filling a need within the profession. Historically, many veterinary technicians remain in the field less than ten years, but now more are opting to stay in the field longer. In 2007 National Demographic Survey Study
conducted by NAVTA, the top two issues that respondents believed would affect them in the next five years are salary (65.2%) and specialization in veterinary technology (42.7%). In addition, respondents indicated that their three primary concerns were low salary (NAVTA member: 66.7% / Nonmember: 75.2%), burnout (42.8% / 41.1%), and lack of career advancement (29.4% / 35.9%) (NAVTA, 2008).

The data on the actual earnings of a veterinary technician are variable. The National Estimates for veterinary technicians and technologists from the Bureau of Labor Statics state a mean hourly wage $14.92 and a mean annual wage $31,030 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010). However, according to a 2009 Veterinary Hospital Manager Association (VHMA) survey, VTS earn more ($19.30 median hourly wage) than their CVT counterparts ($16.00 median hourly wage) (Rose, 2010). Additionally, the NAVTA 2007 Demographic Survey lists a NAVTA member having an average salary of $36,120 and a nonmember of $31,070 (NAVTA, 2008). It has been suggested that the variability may in part be due to the lack of distinction between credentialed and non-credentialed veterinary technicians in some of these surveys – specifically the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (Norkus, 2009).

**Current understanding**

There is an even smaller amount of data regarding the benefits of those attaining VTS status. In a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (JAVMA) surveys were sent to VTS of the ADVT, AIMVT, AVECCT, and the AVTA. The mean hourly wage of respondents was $23.48, but the data viewed as a whole revealed that the typical VTS did not receive a one-time bonus or pay raise for achieving VTS status. The study also showed that on average received 3 weeks’ vacation and between $250 – 500 annually for CE (Norkus, 2009). It should be noted have VTS have the opportunity to supplement their income by writing peer reviewed articles, lecturing at conferences and consulting (Rose, 2010).

**Conclusion**

It is clear that further study is required. Although preliminary data may indicate that there is an elevated pay rate associated with VTS status, it must be compared against those credentialed veterinary technicians with similar experience. Additional study is also needed to determine whether there is a correlation between becoming a VTS and job satisfaction. Analysis of survey data will provide insight into identification of the benefits of obtaining Veterinary Technician Specialty status as there is a lack of convincing data to date.

**Methodology**

This project has been developed in order to identify the benefits (tangible and intangible) of a veterinary technicians earning recognition as a Veterinary Technician Specialist (VTS). This is to be a concurrent mixed method research project. A mixed method combines qualitative and quantitative research designs. The data will be obtained via open and closed ended questions. Close ended questions will quantitate variables such as salary, bonus, and employment benefits; while the open ended questions will address the subjective data such as job satisfaction, respect, and skill utilization. By combining these two methods, the results will provide more comprehensive data than either design could accomplish alone (Creswell, 2009). Survey data will be the main source for data analysis and interpretation.

Surveys distributed to Veterinary Technician Specialists will be limited to those academies that have offered their first examination and have inducted VTS members. Those VTS academies that only consist of organizing members will not be included. The members of the following academies will be contacted: Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT) consisting of 34 members, Academy of Veterinary Technician Anesthetists (AVTA) 129 members, Academy of Internal Medicine Veterinary Technicians (AIMVT) 99 members, Academy of Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT) 292 members, Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (ABVT) 9 members, and the Academy of Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians (AEVNT) 4 members. At this point the total number of recognized VTS is 567.
The research objectives include:

- Make contact with VTS academies in order to facilitate data acquisition. This has been completed and there are no problems anticipated with cooperation and survey distribution.

- Develop a survey designed to evaluate VTS parameters such as salary, benefits, job satisfaction, etc. This survey will be distributed via Survey Monkey® and will be circulated to VTSs via e-mail and VTS academy list-serves. The sample population number will be determined by survey respondents. Prior to the survey, age and sex is unknown. Race will not be determined. The sample population will be limited to credentialed veterinary technicians having VTS status. Confidentiality and permission will be addressed via a letter of informed consent.

- Develop an altered survey designed to evaluate CVT parameters such as salary, benefits, job satisfaction, etc. of non-VTS credentialed veterinary technicians of similar experience. This survey will be distributed via Survey Monkey® and will be circulated to CVTs via e-mail, state association newsletters, and St. Petersburg College alumni via the veterinary technology student commons. The sample population number will be determined by survey respondents. Prior to the survey, age and sex is unknown. Race will not be determined. The sample population will be limited to credentialed veterinary technicians. Confidentiality and permission will be addressed via a letter of informed consent.

- Data will be analyzed to determine the benefits of attaining VTS status. The data will be compromised of the above surveys using both closed and open ended questions.

- Data collection for this mixed method research project will predominately be obtained by survey data, but personal interviews may be utilized as deemed necessary. This will be reserved for any clarification of responses required from open ended questions.

Results
Survey Population
The survey elicited responses from 403 Credentialed Veterinary Technicians (CVT), 99 (24.6%) of which are further defined as Veterinary Technicians Specialists (VTS). The highest academic degree reached by the majority of participants was an Associate’s Degree (56% or 226/403). Most respondents (28% or 113/403) reside in the Northeast area of the United States, 24.6% (99/403) in the West, 22.6% (91/403) in the Midwest, 18.9% (76/403) in the South, and 6% (24/403) reside outside the United States. The geographical distribution of responses was: 186/403 (46%) city, 162/403 (40%) suburban, and 55/403 (14%) rural.

Most respondents were female (93.3% or 376/403), between the ages of 26 to 35 (19.4% or 78/403) with 1 to 10 years of experience as credentialed veterinary technicians (52.1% or 210/403). Although specific VTS demographics confirmed a female majority (91% or 90/99), there were differences noted as well. Most VTSs were found to be between the ages of 36 to 45 (39% or 39/99) with 11 to 15 years of CVT experience (39% or 39/99); whereas non-VTS CVTs were more likely to be between the ages of 26 to 35 years old (44% or 134/304) with 1 to 10 years of CVT experience (59.5% or 181/304).

The predominant (55% or 222/403) working environment is private practice for all participants (non-VTS: 62.5% or 190/304 and VTS: 32.3% or 32/99). However, high proportions of VTS are also present in teaching hospitals 30.3% (30/99) and unspecified environments 23.2% (23/99). The species of patients most commonly seen in practice by respondents are Small Animal Mixed (46.2% or 186/403, non-VTS: 49% or 148/304, VTS: 38.4% or 39/99), Canine/Feline only (37% or 149/403, non-VTS: 36% or 110/304, VTS: 37.4% or 39/99), and Small/Large Animal Mixed (72% or 29/403, non-VTS: 5% or 15/304, VTS: 14.1% or 14/99).

Benefits
The majority of participants (47.6% or 192/403, non-VTS: 49.7% or 151/304, VTS: 41.4% or 41/99) had been employed by their current employer for 0 to 5 years. 89.6% or 361/403 of respondents work at least 31 hours per week (non-VTS 88.2% or 268/304 and VTS 93.9% or 93/99). Non-VTS are more likely to receive 2 weeks of annual vacation (43.4% or 132/304), but 56.6% of surveyed VTS (56/99) receive a 3 weeks of vacation compared to their CVT counterparts (30.3% or 92/304). Annual CE allotment is higher in VTS recognized technicians. 29.3% of VTS (29/99) were allowed $500 – 999/year and 24.2% (24/99) were allotted ≥ $1000/year. 71 out of 99 VTS (71.7%) also receive paid time off for CE. In comparison, the majority of non-VTS respondents (34.2% or 104/304) reported an annual CE allotment of less than $250/year with 52.6% (160/304) receiving paid time off for CE.

The most common benefits received by all respondents were paid vacation (87% or 350/403), free/discounted animal care (84% or 337/403), health insurance (75% or 303/403), and paid overtime (73% or 293/403). The benefits most commonly available to non-VTS CVTs were free/discounted animal care (84.9% or 258/304), paid vacation (84.5% or 257/304), paid overtime (73% or 222/304), and health insurance (71.4% or 217/304). In comparison, VTS respondents received paid vacation (93.9% or 93/99), health insurance (86.9% or 86/99), free/discounted animal care (79.8% or 79/99), and dental insurance (74.7% or 74/99). When all available benefits were combined and correlated with experience, it was found that VTS technicians with between 1 and 20 years of experience consistently received more overall benefits versus their CVT counterparts (see overall benefits by experience chart).
Benefits of Becoming a Veterinary Technician Specialist, continued

Job Satisfaction
Out of the 403 respondents, 268 (66%) reported that they were satisfied in the field of veterinary technology, 123 (31%) were mostly satisfied, but were unsure if they would stay in the profession, and 12 (3%) were not satisfied and would definitely change to another field. Those that had attained VTS status reported a slightly higher satisfaction rate of 71% (70/99) compared with the non-VTS group (66% or 198/304). However, VTSs also had a higher rate of dissatisfaction at 5% (5/99). Only 2% (7/304) of non-VTS reported they would likely leave the profession.

VTS Respondents
VTS respondents were from the following academies: Academy of Veterinary Technician Anesthetists (AVTA) – 32%, Academy of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT) – 25%, Academy of Internal Medicine Veterinary Technicians (AIMVT) – 19%, Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT) – 12%, Academy of Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians (AEVNT) – 3%, Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (AVBT) – 1%, and the remaining 8% were unspecified.

Most VTS participants (58.6% or 58/99) reported receiving a pay increase when VTS status was conferred. The mean increase was described as $3 per hour or 9%. A small number of VTS (17.2% or 17/99) received a one-time bonus. 58.8% (10/17) received ≤ $500 and 41.2% (7/17) received between $501 – 3,000. Only 12% (7/58) received both a bonus and a pay increase. The majority of VTS respondents (74.7% or 74/99) reported having lecturing experience compared to only 30.3% (92/304) of non-VTS technicians. In addition, VTS technicians were more likely to be compensated for lectures (73% or 54/74) compared to non-VTS CVTs (30.3% or 54/174).

In an attempt to ascertain the effect (if any) of VTS status on job satisfaction, the survey included three additional job satisfaction statements specifically geared towards the Veterinary Technician Specialist. 80.8% (80/99) reported an increase in recognition/respect as a direct result of VTS achievement, 71.7% (71/99) reported that their job satisfaction has increased as a direct result of VTS achievement, and 51.5% (51/99) reported that their skills are more utilized as a direct result of VTS achievement.

Discussion
Demographics
On the whole, all respondents had fairly similar demographics. One difference noted was that the majority of non-VTS technicians were between the ages of 26 to 35, whereas the VTS technicians were mostly in the 36 to 45 age group category. Another difference noted was that the non-VTS respondents largely demonstrated 1 to 10 years-experience as veterinary technicians versus VTS respondents that had 11 to 15 years-experience. This may reflect the advanced level of experience and knowledge that is required in order to become a VTS, or perhaps that attaining VTS is more conducive to the lifestyle more prevalent in older technicians. Although the majority of all respondents reported to work in private practice a higher proportion of VTS are seen in teaching hospitals compared to their non-VTS counterparts. This is most likely due to the unique advanced caseload available to veterinary technicians in teaching hospitals.

Benefits
Most veterinary technicians work more than 31 hours per week and earn paid vacation. The majority of VTS have longer vacations and greater CE allowances (overall financial allotment and time off). This may be due to the fact that VTS are required to attend significantly more CE in order to maintain their status as specialists. Another factor may be that VTS are choosing to fully utilize available CE benefits in comparison to non-VTS. When all available benefits were combined and correlated with experience, it was found that VTS technicians with between 1 and 20 years-experience consistently received more overall benefits versus their CVT counterparts.

Although the minority of VTS respondents were given a one-time bonus, the majority reported a pay increase when VTS status was conferred. Additional financial compensation is possible for those technicians that lecture. The majority of VTS report lecturing and VTS are much more likely to be compensated for their time versus non-VTS.

Job Satisfaction
Although it was found that a higher proportion of VTS reported a higher satisfaction rate, they also reported a higher rate of dissatisfaction. It is plausible that VTS status solidified the respondents feeling of job satisfaction one way or another, therefore reducing the middle ground of being unsure of they would stay in the profession. The three additional job satisfaction statements available to VTS respondents supported the perception of an increase in recognition/respect and job satisfaction as a direct result of VTS achievement. However, data was not convincing regarding an increase in skill utilization as a direct result of VTS achievement. Based on comments provided, VTS respondents felt that their skills were already readily utilized by their employers, regardless of additional VTS recognition.

Conclusion
The data obtained and analyzed for this project regarding the benefits of Veterinary Technicians Specialists indicate that there are benefits to obtaining VTS status above and beyond those of personal development. The data is limited by the responses of the participants, but there appears to be correlations that cannot be ignored. This data will be helpful for those that wish to make a more educated decision regarding VTS endeavors and perhaps encourage those individuals toward professional development.
Appendices

Appendix A:
Letter of Informed Consent

Purpose of the Study/Participant Selection:
The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the benefits of becoming a veterinary technician specialist (VTS). You have been selected to participate in this survey because you are a credentialed veterinary technician. This survey is open to all credentialed veterinary technicians.

Level of Involvement:
This short survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Your feedback is valued and much appreciated.

Benefits:
By participating in this study you will be providing information to identify the benefits of becoming a veterinary technician specialist (VTS). The data will be examined, analyzed, and reported upon in order for credentialed veterinary technicians to make an informed decision regarding pursuing this advanced recognition.

Notation of risk:
No risks are anticipated from participating in this survey. Data gathered from this survey will be examined and analyzed with conclusions presented in educational venues.

Guarantee of Confidentiality:
All responses will be anonymous, kept strictly confidential, and will be published in educational presentations and publications. No names or other identifiers will be used.

Ability to Opt-Out/Withdraw:
You acknowledge having read this information and agree to participate in this study by completing and returning this survey. You may stop the survey at any point if you choose.

How the findings will be used:
The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

Identification of Researcher/Institution/Contact Information:
The data will be examined, analyzed, and reported upon by the principal researcher, Liza W. Rudolph, an enrolled student of the Bachelors of Veterinary Technology program at St. Petersburg College. If you have any questions or concerns about this study please contact the principal researcher at lwrvt@aol.com or the project supervisor Dr. Wendy Rib at rib.wendy@spcollege.edu.

References:

Editor's note: Liza W. Rudolph, LVT, VTS, (CP — Canine/Feline) finished her thesis for St. Petersburg College in April 2012. This is her paper with results, discussion, her conclusion, appendices and references.
The students of the Lincoln Memorial University Veterinary Medical Technology Program greatly appreciate the honor bestowed upon us as the NAVTA Student Chapter of the Year for 2011. We want to thank everyone for this opportunity and will continue to strive towards bigger and better things. During LMU’s Homecoming, the LMU-VMT students entered a float for the homecoming parade, which was decorated in honor of National Veterinary Technician Week to reflect the motto as “T.E.C.H. savvy”. Also during Homecoming week, LMU-VMT celebrated its first Annual Veterinary Homecoming Expo. The expo was designed to promote the program and to inform the public on issues dealing with their beloved animals. Our next great adventure, the annual “LMU Vet Tech Dog Show”, will be held on November 3, 2012 at Haymaker Farms in Speedwell, Tenn. It is open to the public, so come out and enjoy the show. Also to finish up our events for National Veterinary Technician Week, LMU, hosted a continuing education conference on November 16, 2012.

—Ashley Tipton
SCNAVTA President 2012/2013
Central Carolina Community College

Veterinary Medical Technology Program enjoyed a fun-filled National Vet Tech Week sponsored by their student chapter with NAVTA. The students enjoyed raffle baskets filled with all kinds of donated goodies from many industry vendors and local retailers. Each day of the week students were treated to various delicious treats sponsored by SCNAVTA and had an opportunity to socialize with their classmates and have some fun downtime. Also, all of the students attended the North Carolina State Fair that week and had the opportunity to learn about many agricultural opportunities for Technicians, plus eat great food and spend the day outside enjoying the beautiful Fall weather in NC with their classmates and instructors. Best of all the students were able to enjoy a week honoring the profession that they are all working so hard to become a part of and they will hopefully take the tradition of celebrating this week into the industry.

–Beckie Mossor, RVT
CCCC SCNAVTA Advisor

Pictured: SCNAVTA members with Central Carolina Community College made a variety of treats, including popcorn (top photo) and photo collages (bottom photo) to celebrate National Veterinary Technician Week.

We want to hear your news!

In each edition of The NAVTA Journal we share state association, specialty and SCNAVTA updates. Share news about your group by emailing updates to editor@navta.net.
**Why Is Rocky So Stocky?**

**Obesity is a Disease!**

By Kara M. Burns, MS, MEd, LVT
President, Academy of Veterinary Nutrition Technicians

**Objective:** For readers to better understand the importance of pets being a healthy weight and looking at obesity in a new light. It is a disease.

Pet obesity has reached epidemic proportions in the US and other industrialized countries, which parallels the epidemic in the human population. It is estimated that 35%-40% of adult pets and 50% of pets over age 7 are overweight or obese.¹,²,³,⁴ Obesity can be defined as an increase in fat tissue mass sufficient to contribute to disease. Dogs and cats weighing 10%-19% more than the optimal weight for their breed are considered overweight; those weighing 20% or more

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This program was reviewed and approved by the AAVSB RACE program for 1 hour of continuing education in jurisdictions which recognize AAVSB RACE approval. Please contact the AAVSB RACE program if you have any comments/concerns regarding this program’s validity or relevancy to the veterinary profession.
above the optimum weight are considered obese. Obesity has been associated with a number of disease conditions, as well as with a reduced lifespan. A combination of excessive caloric intake, decreased physical activity and genetic susceptibility are associated with most cases of obesity and the primary treatment for obesity is reduced caloric intake and increased physical activity. Obesity is one of the leading preventable causes of illness/death and, with the dramatic rise in pet obesity over the past several decades, weight management and obesity prevention should be among the top health issues healthcare team members discuss with every client.

**Causes of Obesity**

Obesity is caused by an imbalance of energy intake and energy expenditure – it is very simple – too many calories in, not enough calories expended! There are several risk factors that affect energy balance. In today’s society, indoor pets (in North America) are typically neutered. While there are many positive health benefits associated with neutering, it is important that metabolic impacts are addressed as well. Studies have demonstrated that neutering may result in a decreased metabolic rate and increased food intake, and if energy intake is not adjusted, body weight, body condition score and amount of body fat will increase resulting in an overweight or obese pet. Other recognized risk factors for obesity include breed, age, decreased physical activity, and type of food and feeding method.5,6

Specific breeds of dogs and cats are more likely to become overweight. In dogs, these include Shetland Sheepdogs, golden retrievers, dachshunds, cocker spaniels, Labrador retrievers, Dalmatians, Rottweilers and mixed breeds. In cats, mixed breeds and Manx cats have been found more likely to be obese compared to most purebred cats. Veterinary technicians should begin discussions on maintaining appropriate/optimal weight in pets, particularly in at-risk breeds, during the initial puppy/kitten health and wellness examination.

**Health Risks Associated with Obesity**

There are many health conditions associated with obesity in pets including arthritis, diabetes mellitus (DM), cancer, skin diseases, lower urinary tract problems, hepatic lipidosis, and heart disease. Obese pets are also more difficult to manage in terms of sample collection (blood, urine) and catheter placement. Also obese pets may be more prone to treatment complications including difficulty intubating, respiratory distress, slower recovery time, and delayed wound healing. It is widely believed that obesity affects quality of life and leads to reduced life expectancy. The dramatic impact of excess body weight in dogs and cats has been demonstrated. In cats, it is estimated that 31% of DM and 34% of lameness cases could be eliminated if cats were at optimum body weight. In dogs, lifespan was increased by nearly 2 years in dogs that were maintained at an optimal body condition.7 It’s important to recognize and to communicate to our clients that fat tissue is not inert...obesity

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**The following questions should be part of every nutritional assessment:**

- What brand of food do you feed your pet (try to get specific name)?
- Do you feed moist or dry or both?
- How do you feed your pet – feeding method (how much, how often)?
- Does your pet receive any snacks or treats of any kind? If so, what and how often?
- Do you give your pet any supplements?
- Is your pet on any medications, including chewable medications? If so, obtain name and dosage.
- What type of chew toys does your pet play with?
- Do you feed your pet any foods or treats not specifically designated for pets (such as human foods)? If so, what and how often.
- Does your pet have ANY access to other sources of food (neighbor, trash, family member, etc.).

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*Image and text from Continuing Education: The following questions should be part of every nutritional assessment*
Obesity, continued

is not an aesthetic condition that only affects our pet’s ability to interact with us on a physical activity level. Fat tissue is metabolically active and in fact is the largest endocrine organ in the body and has an unlimited growth potential. Fat tissue is an active producer of hormones and inflammatory cytokines and the chronic low-grade inflammation secondary to obesity contributes to obesity-related diseases.5,7

Evaluating Weight and Nutrition

Obesity is a difficult disease to talk with owners about because most pet owners do not recognize (or want to admit) that their pet is overweight. All members of the healthcare team need to commit to understanding and communicating the role of weight management in pet health and disease prevention. In particular, the veterinary technician is the primary source for client education; the interface between the client, the doctor, and the rest of the hospital team; and is the key advocate for the patient.

The healthcare team should assess every patient that comes into the hospital, every time they come in to the hospital to establish nutritional needs and feeding goals. These goals will vary depending on the pet’s physiology, obesity risk factors, and current health status. Designing and implementing a weight management protocol supports the team, the client, and most importantly the patient.5,6

The first steps in patient evaluation are as follows: a complete history including a detailed nutritional history and a complete physical examination including a complete blood count, serum chemistry and urinalysis. Signalment data should include species, breed, age, gender, neuter status, weight, activity level, and environment. The nutritional history should determine the type of food (all food) fed, the feeding method (how much, how often), who is responsible for feeding the pet and any other sources of energy intake (no matter how small or seemingly insignificant).6

Obtaining a complete nutritional history supports consistency and accuracy of patient information, provides key insights to barriers in client compliance, guides client discussion, and supports the optimal weight management program for the pet.

Be sure to weigh the pet and obtain a body condition score at every visit and record the information in the patient’s medical record. It’s helpful to use the same scale and chart the findings for the client. Body condition scoring (BCS) is important to assess a patient’s fat stores and muscle mass. A healthy and successful weight management program results in loss of fat tissue while maintaining lean body mass and consistent and accurate assessment of weight and BCS are important tools to track progress. The use of body condition charts and breed charts are helpful tools in discussing the importance of weight management with clients and helps them visualize what an optimal weight would look like on their pet.

Weight Management Program

As with many aspects of healthcare, designing a successful weight management program is not a ‘one program fits all’ for our patients. The components of a successful weight management program include consistent and accurate weight measurement/patient monitoring, effective client communication, identification of compliance gaps, and utilization of tools to reinforce compliance, client and patient support and program re-structure as needed.

Setting a goal for weight loss and calculating the appropriate energy intake starts with determination of the pet’s ideal body weight. Ideal body weight is a starting goal that is adjusted for appropriate body condition as the pet loses weight. It is important to determine the number of daily calories that will result in weight loss while providing adequate protein, vitamins and minerals to meet the pet’s daily energy requirement (DER). The DER reflects the pet’s activity level and is a calculation based on the pet’s resting energy requirement (RER).

There are a couple of basic formulas that all technicians should memorize or have on laminated note cards in every exam room (along with a calculator)! The most accurate formula to determine the RER for a cat or a dog is:

\[
\text{RER kcal/day} = 70(\text{Ideal Body Weight in Kg})^{0.75}
\]

or
\[
\text{RER kcal/day} = (\text{kg} \times \text{kg} \times \text{kg}, \sqrt[\text{3}]{\text{kg}}) \times 70
\]

Once RER is determined, DER may be calculated by multiplying RER by ‘standard’ factors related to energy needs. The calculations used to determine energy needs for obese prone pets or for pets needing to lose weight are5,6,8

Obese prone dogs DER = 1.4 x RER
Weight loss/dogs DER = 1.0 x RER
Obese prone cats DER = 1.0 x RER
Weight loss/cats DER = 0.8 x RER

Gathering the above information takes only a few minutes and is the foundation for developing a weight loss program that includes: 1) Target weight or weight loss goal, 2) maximum daily caloric intake, and 3) specific food, amount of food and method of feeding. The program should also include specific protocols for monitoring the pet’s weight (schedule these before the client leaves and send reminder cards), adjusting the pet’s energy intake accordingly and exercise guidelines/suggestions. There are numerous ways for an owner to get their pet active and it is the role of the veterinary technician to discuss these with the client and determine which may work for that specific patient and client. It can and should start simply – having the owner walk their dog to the end of the driveway for example. Also, starting to play with interactive toys with their cat for a few minutes a day would be a great way to begin to get cats more interactive and exercising. Gradually you want to educate the owner to build up the distance and time spent exercising. If the owner is excited and takes the dog on a 3 mile walk on the first day, the dog may tire easily and the owner may find this frustrating and not want to walk with their dog again. Remember
to advise owners that exercise needs to begin in moderation. By following this, a more successful outcome will result.6

There are several specific recommendations that support a successful weight loss program including:

1. Emphasizing feeding consistency including feeding the pet from its designated dish only.
2. Be sure the client is using an 8 ounce measuring cup.
3. Recommend the appropriate weight loss food and calculate the initial feeding amount.
4. Discuss the importance of total energy intake (do not feed anything other than the recommended food at the designated amount).
5. If the client wants to ‘treat’ their pet, make appropriate recommendations and adjust the caloric intake of the base food accordingly.
6. Encourage clients to feed their pets separately if possible.
7. Recommend appropriate exercise for the pet.
8. Offer your clients suggestions on ways other than food to reward or bond with their pet.
9. Evaluate, adjust, communicate, and encourage on a consistent basis.

Summary
Successful weight management begins by recognizing that overweight and obesity is a disease as well as the importance of weight control in our pets. It is essential that the healthcare team, specifically the veterinary technician, communicate the serious effects that even a few excess pounds can have on the health and longevity of their pet’s lives. Weight management should be a cornerstone wellness program in every clinic and the veterinary technician the champion of the program and advocate for the patient.

References
Obesity Quiz

1. Which one of the following is not a causative factor associated with obesity?
   a. Genetic susceptibility
   b. Frequent diet changes
   c. Excessive intake of calories
   d. Decreased exercise

2. Which one of the following is not considered to be a common risk factor for obesity?
   a. Immune status
   b. Age
   c. Neutering
   d. Breed

3. Which patients should have their nutritional needs and feeding goals assessed when coming to the hospital?
   a. Only breeds that are at risk for obesity
   b. Only pets that are currently obese
   c. Only pets that are diagnosed with an obesity-related disease
   d. Every pet that comes into the hospital

4. If a dog or cat weighs _______ above its optimum weight, it should be considered obese.
   a. 5%
   b. 10%
   c. 15%
   d. 20%

5. Fat tissue is the largest _______ in the body.
   a. Endocrine organ
   b. Exocrine organ
   c. Inflammatory organ
   d. Lymphatic organ

6. Typically, when working on weight loss with an obese pet in veterinary practice, the _______ is the key advocate for the patient.
   a. Veterinary Technician
   b. Veterinarian
   c. Pet owner
   d. Client Service Representative

7. The first step in setting a goal for weight loss is:
   a. Determining the pet's body condition score
   b. Determining the pet's daily energy requirement
   c. Determining the pet's ideal body weight
   d. Determining the pet's resting energy requirement

8. Obese pets are at an increased risk of:
   a. Eye infections
   b. Diabetes insipidus
   c. Treatment complications
   d. Both B and C

9. Body condition scoring is used to assess a patient's:
   a. Muscle mass and body weight
   b. Fats stores and muscle mass
   c. Fat stores and abdominal circumference
   d. Abdominal circumference and body weight

10. Some studies have suggested that neutering a pet can affect a pet’s energy balance by causing:
    a. An increase in food intake
    b. A decrease in metabolic rate
    c. A decrease in libido
    d. Both A and B

This article is worth one continuing education credit and will be accepted for grading until Feb. 28, 2014. To receive credit, please complete the quiz online at www.VetMedTeam.com. There will be a $5 fee for each quiz.

*Due to updates and changes authorized by NAVTA, the online quiz may not be the same as the printed exam within The NAVTA Journal. Read each question thoroughly and answer it as it appears in the online exam. Please do not simply copy your answers from the printed version.
Are You Ready to Go? A Guide to the Best in Veterinary Conventions

Oreta M. Samples, RVT, MPH, DHSc

With no less than four major veterinary conferences available throughout the year, veterinary technicians have more choices than ever before when selecting a conference and other opportunities for continuing education and professional growth. However, classes and wet labs are not all that conferences have to offer. A national veterinary conference equals a major opportunity to network and advance one’s career while gaining valuable recognition within the field of veterinary technology. Conferences are more affordable than ever and there is guaranteed to be one within traveling distance regardless of where one lives. If budgetary concerns are an issue, consider some sweat equity as a way of lowering the bill. Many conferences such as the American Veterinary Medical Association will reduce, or in some cases waive, all or part of the registration fees if the participant will volunteer to work for an agreed upon number of hours in exchange for the registration fee. There are several conventions around the country to take advantage of; this article will introduce the reader to a variety of great veterinary technician experiences to be had in a chronological fashion.

North American Veterinary Conference:

The North American Veterinary Conference, held each January, takes advantage of the temperate and mild weather of Orlando, Fla., where attendees are treated to a break from winter’s chilling effects. With close proximity to Disney World, Sea World and a host of other major attractions, this is the one conference that the whole family can enjoy. The conference will be held Jan. 19 to 23, 2013. As the first veterinary conference of the year, this is the place to be for new releases in technology and education. Veterinary technician students enjoy a reduced registration fee and are treated like royalty in Orlando. The NAVC also allows one to complete a partial registration and pay for their registration fees in more than one payment, but be warned that your registration is not deemed complete until all payments are received. This conference boasts the largest exhibit hall as well as the largest meeting of exotics practitioners at one conference.

Western Veterinary Conference:

The Western Veterinary Conference is held in Las Vegas, Nevada every February; the next conference is to be held February 17-21 of 2013 at Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino. In years past the convention was divided between two resort casino venues with the majority of the veterinary portion in one while technician presentations were held at a separate locale. However currently the convention caters to both veterinarians and technicians all under one roof. First held in 1928 in neighboring Utah, this convention offers a Technician Fair and a Technician Reception as well as an impressive lineup of speakers and wet labs designed with the veterinary technician in mind. In 2013, the will be over 500 exhibitors spread out over 350,000 square feet showcasing the newest in equipment. For more information, consult the conference website at www.wvc.org where it will soon be possible to register early for the 2013 convention. Surrounded by the opulent splendor that is the Las Vegas strip, this convention offers much in the way of education as well as entertainment during one’s stay. Although traditionally thought of as an “adult” playground, Las Vegas has long recognized the need for more family oriented and kid-friendly venues and while children are not welcome on the casino floor, most hotels offer some sort of venue for family entertainment.
American Veterinary Medical Association:

Geographically, the AVMA Annual Convention is the only one of the major conferences that is held in a different city within the United States each year. Since the author began attending AVMA conferences, the conference has showcased Honolulu, Hawaii, Seattle, Washington, Atlanta, Georgia and St. Louis, Missouri. Showcased is probably the best word to describe the AVMA’s efforts as the local flavor of the host city is heavily reflected and incorporated through every facet of the convention. From fresh salmon pate in Seattle to musical bluesy reflections in St. Louis, the AVMA seeks to educate and entertain participants continuously throughout their stay. This year’s will be held July 20 to 23, 2013. To plan your next AVMA experience, check out the website at www.avma.org for locations. In 2012, attendees flocked to San Diego, Calif., for the AVMA experience while he convention heads to Chicago, Ill., in 2013. The AVMA Annual Convention is a convention that allows technicians to put in 10 hours of sweat equity to have their registration fee waived; check the website for more information and contact lists. As someone who has had the opportunity to do this, the author can attest to the fact that it is well worth it. Not only was the fee waived saving a couple of hundred dollars, the author made some great contacts, friends and memories along the way.

American Association of Veterinary State Boards:

To be held from Sept. 19 to 21, 2013, in Kansas City, Mo., the American Association of Veterinary State Boards’ (AAVSB) annual meeting and conference is specifically geared toward: veterinary regulatory board members, administrators, and staff; veterinary professionals with an interest in regulatory issues; veterinary testing and certification agencies; veterinary medical and veterinary technician associations; and veterinary medicine and veterinary technology colleges and programs. This is a great conference because not only will you learn more about AAVSB’s regulations, but also earn RACE-approved CE hours from the organization who runs the RACE approval program. You’ll also help shape the veterinary medicine’s future by participating as a voting delegate. To plan your trip, visit www.aavsb.org/AnnualMeeting/

NAVTA Annual Conference:

Last, but not least, the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) holds an annual conference each year in November. The 2013 conference date hasn’t been set yet, but you can count on it being chalk-full of information centered on veterinary technicians and their professional needs. For information on the upcoming conference, visit http://www.navta.net.

In addition to the “Big 4” discussed in this article, technicians should not discount their local and state conventions as another viable opportunity for gaining CE credits as well as educational opportunities that may be closer to home. State conventions have the added attraction of being less expensive to travel to and are often shorter in duration than national conventions. This may be a bonus for those who cannot take more than a day or so away from work. A quick check with the state veterinary association website in their home area will furnish much information on events throughout the year. Licensed technicians should be reminded that the LEAP CE requirements are not offered at national conventions as these are generally tailored to the state legal and ethical regulations for the state in which one is licensed. This is just one more reason to also stay in touch with the locals and attend some events. If budgets are a concern, always ask if there are ways to reduce or waive registration fees through sweat equity. Think about car-pooling and room sharing as ways to cut costs while allowing participation and fellowship. Above all, have fun!
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