

Who's Who in a Veterinary Practice

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The California Veterinary Medicine Practice Act (VMPA) contains relatively few recognized legal designations for individuals working in veterinary practices. The following helps to clarify the roles of individuals working in veterinary practices based on California law.

Licensee Manager

The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2030.05 defines the licensee manager for a veterinary practice as a California-licensed veterinarian named on the practice's premises permit. This veterinarian is responsible for ensuring that the premises is properly registered with the Veterinary Medical Board (VMB); the practice and all equipment and apparel therein are clean and sanitary at all times in accordance with minimum standards; records are written and kept in accordance with regulations; and the practice and its records are available for inspection by the VMB. The licensee manager is responsible for ensuring that the physical and operational components of the premises meet the minimum standards set forth in sections 2030-2032.5 of the California Code of Regulations, Title 16, Division 20, Article 4. The licensee manager is also responsible for ensuring that no unlicensed activity occurs within the premises or at any outside location where veterinary medicine is being conducted under the auspices of the premises permit. The law requires that a designated licensee manager maintain whatever physical presence is reasonable within the practice to ensure that the legal requirements are being met. Only a California-licensed veterinarian may fill the role of licensee manager.

Veterinarian

The California Business and Professions Code, section 4826 defines what constitutes the practice of veterinary medicine in California. It includes provisions for the various branches of veterinary practice, such as surgery and dentistry. It also specifies that the acts of diagnosing, prescribing, or administering medications or treatments to animals are part of veterinary practice. Section 4825 states that no person shall practice veterinary medicine without being licensed in the state. The law also restricts the use of any words, letters, or

titles in relation to practicing as a veterinarian to those who are licensed.

Supervising Veterinarian

The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2035 discusses the duties of a supervising veterinarian. A supervising veterinarian may or may not be the practice licensee manager. The supervising veterinarian is the doctor who has established a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) in order to treat the animal patient, and who directs and oversees staff as they carry out allowable animal health care tasks. The supervising veterinarian may delegate tasks to qualified staff under either direct or indirect supervision. Direct supervision means that the veterinarian has examined the animal, established a VCPR as specified by law, and is physically present on the premises while staff perform directed procedures. With indirect supervision, the same physical exam and VCPR must be completed, but the veterinarian is not physically present on the premises while staff perform directed tasks. The supervising veterinarian is responsible for determining the competency of the staff member performing the allowable animal health care tasks.

Registered Veterinary Technician (RVT)

The California Business and Professions Code, section 4839 specifies the criteria required to be a registered veterinary technician which includes education and examination requirements. Section 4839.5 restricts the use of the titles registered veterinary technician, veterinary technician, RVT, and any other words, letters, or symbols if the intent in using them is to represent that the person is authorized to act as a registered veterinary technician. The statute does not apply to the title "technician" if the person using the title does not intend to represent him or herself as a registered veterinary technician. For instance, an automotive technician or computer technician are not in violation of this statute because they are not intending to represent themselves as being authorized to act as an RVT. The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2036 specifically lists animal health care tasks that only RVTs may perform (as opposed to other staff members). RVT-

only tasks include inducing anesthesia, applying casts or splints, performing dental extractions, suturing cutaneous, subcutaneous, or gingival tissues, and creating a relief hole in the skin to facilitate the placement of an intravenous catheter.

Veterinary Assistant

The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2036.5 describes a veterinary assistant as a member of a veterinary practice who performs auxiliary animal health care tasks other than the RVT-only tasks listed above. A veterinary assistant may perform auxiliary health care tasks under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian or the direct supervision of an RVT. The law specifies that the degree of supervision over a veterinary assistant performing a given animal health care task must be equal to or higher than the degree of supervision over an RVT performing the same task. The law also states that the performance of health care tasks by veterinary assistants must be consistent with standards of good veterinary medical practices.

VACSP Holder/Permit Holder

The term "permit holder" is written in several locations in the VMPA. It refers to a Veterinary Assistant Controlled Substance Permit (VACSP) holder. While all VACSP holders are veterinary assistants, the terms "permit holder" and "veterinary assistant" are not synonymous. VACSP holders may perform the same tasks as veterinary assistants, but in addition, VACSP holders are also permitted to obtain and administer controlled substances while working under the supervision of a licensee manager. The California Business and Professions Code section 4836.2 lists the requirements and qualifications needed to obtain a VACSP.

Understanding who is who in a veterinary practice improves compliance with the VMPA and results in increased consumer protection and patient safety. Ensuring that all members of the practice team are aware of legal designations will assist in better understanding their roles. ■

