

My career

Veterinary technician

Lindsay Calhoun



Wyckoff, New Jersey

BLS fast facts: Veterinary technologists and technicians

- May 2013 employment: 87,870 (excludes self-employed)
- 2012–22 projection: 30 percent growth (much faster than average)
- May 2013 median wage: \$14.66 hourly, \$30,500 annually
- Typical education and training: Associate's degree
- May 2013 top employing industries: Veterinary services; state colleges, universities, and professional schools; social advocacy organizations; research and development in the physical, engineering, and life sciences; and federal government, excluding postal service

What do you do?

I am a Licensed Veterinary Technician (LVT) at an emergency animal hospital. Animals are brought here when they are sick, hurt, or in need of medical attention. Depending on which part of the hospital I am scheduled to work in, I do lots of different types of tasks as an LVT.

Being an LVT means getting your hands dirty and doing some grunt work. No matter which part of the hospital I'm scheduled to work in, I always have to do things like clean out cages, wipe down tables, sterilize instruments, and clean up messes.

Describe the different kinds of tasks you do in each part of the hospital.

As an assistant in the exam room, I meet with pet owners to talk about the reason for their visit and record their pet's weight and medical history. I assist the vet during the appointment with tasks such as retrieving medications and controlling the animal during the exam, if needed. Working in the pharmacy, I fill prescriptions, prepare controlled substances, and restock medications.

When I am scheduled to help with surgeries, I do things like prepping the animal, starting the IV, and monitoring the anesthesia.

When I work in the treatment room, I take care of all of the hospitalized animals. When an animal is admitted, I give it an IV and set it up on fluids. Throughout the day, depending on how sick the animals are, I may have to administer medication or care for them in other ways. And, of course, I give them extra love and attention.

On other days, I see the scheduled appointments that don't require the presence of a vet. These appointments can be as simple as giving a vaccine or more complicated, such as removing a suture or changing a bandage.

Emergency hospitals can get incredibly busy, so it helps to have an extra set of hands in the lab. I might help with spinning tubes of blood or urine, testing and sending out bloodwork, or making and viewing slides under the microscope.

How does your education tie in with your career?

I have a bachelor's degree in elementary education. After college, I became an elementary school teacher and taught 4th grade for 5 years.

But animals have always been my true passion. And, after teaching for a few years, I realized I wanted to do something that I was passionate about. So I decided to go back to school, and I got my associate's degree

in veterinary technology. The program was incredibly hands-on and informative, and it included learning with live animals. After I graduated, I passed a national exam and became an LVT.

While my main job is working at the animal hospital, I am also an adjunct teacher in the program where I earned my associate's degree. I teach two classes: clinical lab and surgical nursing lab. Teaching allows me to use the skills from my background in education. I also attend continuing education seminars to keep my knowledge and skills current.



How did you get your current job?

After my first year of schooling for my associate's degree, a former coworker told me about the job opening at an animal hospital. Once the hospital received my application and referrals, I went in for a formal interview and was asked about my education and work experience.

Then I was asked back for a working interview, in which I was paired with a veterinary assistant who worked there. I shadowed her on the job, both observing and helping out so I could demonstrate my skills. This helped show if I meshed with the hospital staff as well as how much on-the-job training I would need.

Since I was still in my second year of school at that time, the hospital hired me as a veterinary assistant. But once I passed the LVT certification exam after school, they hired me on as an LVT.

Did anything else help prepare you for your job?

I have always loved animals and been interested in helping them. When I was a kid, I rode horses and had dogs, cats, lizards, fish, and a guinea pig. I also took in and cared for a few stray animals. Being around a variety of animals throughout my life has definitely helped prepare me for working at an animal hospital.

What do you hope to do next?

For now, I like working in emergency animal medicine, but I also hope to begin volunteering my time and donating my skills to local animal shelters for things like vaccination clinics and spaying and neutering stray animals.

What's your best advice for aspiring vet techs?

Go through school and get your license. It is possible to work without a license in some states, but with the proper schooling, you'll get all of the skills and knowledge that you'll need. And once you pass the exam and receive your license, you'll have more job options and be able to earn more money.

Also, I think it's important to get a job in an animal hospital as soon as you can. It doesn't matter if you don't have any practical experience yet. Apply to work in the kennel to get your foot in the door, and work your way up from there. Hands-on experience, along with the knowledge you will get in school, will make you a better veterinary technician.



Lindsay Calhoun was interviewed by Sara Royster, an economist in the Office of Occupational Statistics and Employment Projections, BLS. Sara can be reached at (202) 691-5645 or at royster.sara@bls.gov.