



CAREER QUESTIONS

Veterinary medicine offers a widely varied choice of careers within the profession, ranging from private practice (caring for people's pets), specialty (dealing with eye problems only, etc.), research, teaching (at the Universities), government positions and many more.

The answers to the following questions will relate to the area of general practice, that is, veterinarians that have devoted their career to caring for people's pets and helping to strengthen the human / animal bond. This bond is "the key" to private practice.

WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES OF A VETERINARIAN?

Private practice responsibilities involve caring for people's pets. This means diagnosing illness and instituting treatments that will hopefully resolve the problem and allow the pet to return to the family. This may involve medications (injections, pills, etc.) or surgery. Nutritional advice, training guidelines and solving behavioral problems are also very important. Equally important, but often overlooked by the interested pre-vet, is attending to the needs of the pet owner. Their emotions, concerns with the cost of treatment, and need to be educated and involved with their pet's problem all have to be dealt with. Veterinary medicine is not just a pet business it is actually a people business.

Equally important in the practice of veterinary medicine is the need to run a business. Those that choose to own their own hospital need "business sense". You must learn about profitability, income versus expenses, taxes, employee management and maintenance of the physical plant.

WHY IS VETERINARY MEDICINE SO CHALLENGING?

Veterinary medicine is very challenging because a great deal of **information** (medical facts, etc.) is necessary so that the **animals** can be cared for according to communicated desires of the **people** that own them.

IS THIS AN INDOOR OR OUTDOOR JOB?

Veterinary practice is primarily an indoor business, where 8-12 hours per day is spent inside a veterinary hospital building. Large animal doctors will spend most of their time outdoors and travel from place to place. A few veterinarians specialize in house-call practice and they travel all day long.

WHAT TYPE OF EQUIPMENT SKILLS ARE NEEDED TO BE A VETERINARIAN?

Practicing veterinarians will need to know how to use specialized equipment, such as heart

monitors, xray machines, sterilizing units, anesthetic machines, etc. Most animal hospitals are now computerized and knowledge of how they work is necessary for the day-to-day operation of the business.

WHAT IS "THE KEY" TO BEING A SUCCESSFUL VETERINARIAN?

Private practitioners need to have a good "bedside manner" to be successful. You need to be able to relate to people and communicate clearly. This is a people business and every pet that comes to you for care has a person at the other end of the leash.

Veterinarians must be skilled at remembering facts (what is wrong with the pet based on what information being given) and caring about people and their problems. You are part animal care provider and part psychiatrist. You need to be good with your hands (coordinated) and not bothered by mess (blood, animal waste, etc.).

WHAT ARE THE PRE-VETERINARY EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS?

SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS: A 4-year college degree (3.5 GPA best) is necessary before applying to veterinary school (another 4-year program). Post graduate programs, such as internships and residencies are optional.

You must commit to 8 years of school after high school and be science oriented.

IS EXPERIENCE NECESSARY TO GET ACCEPTED INTO VETERINARY SCHOOL?

Experience is "a must". Veterinary school acceptance is highly competitive and the school must consider more than just great grades. Letters of recommendation, especially from practicing veterinarians, are critical. Working for both small animal (family pets) and large animal (horses, farm animals, etc.) doctors is very important to the admissions committee.

ROP (Regional Occupational Programs) is an excellent way to experience veterinary medicine and decide if you like what you see. Loving animals is only a start. Volunteering at a veterinary hospital or getting an after-school job is very helpful.

HOW MUCH MONEY CAN A VETERINARIAN MAKE?

New veterinarians will have starting salaries around \$40,000 - 50,000 / year. Those with many years of experience can be paid up to \$100,000 / year. Veterinarians that buy their own practices invest in their own land and work very hard can make \$300,000 / year. Interested individuals need to know that veterinary medicine is not a high paying job for the majority of D.V.M.s and that it is not uncommon to start a career with high educational loan debts to be repaid. This profession is not one to enter for the \$\$\$.

SUMMARY

Low pay, long hours and high stress often go hand-in-hand with being a practicing veterinarian. However, the rewards are great. This profession has a high degree of respectability in the eyes of others and designates you immediately as a caring, intelligent individual. People will always be interested in you and conversations often focus on you and what you do.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Internet - log on to <http://www.cvma.net> and click on "veterinary careers".

