



# The Value of VTS Credentials



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The Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Diagnostic Imaging was recognized by the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) to become the 16th veterinary technician specialty on August 8, 2018. The new academy will now be on its path to certifying Veterinary Technician Specialists in Diagnostic Imaging as experts in their specialty field.

## WHAT IS A VETERINARY TECHNICIAN SPECIALIST?

Veterinary Technician Specialists (VTSs) are those who have obtained certifications through academies that have been recognized by the NAVTA Committee on Veterinary Technician Specialties (CVTS) as meeting rigorous standards set to ensure a high level of expertise and competence in the specialty field. Individuals who have obtained designations as a VTS are known to be practicing at the highest level in the specialty area.

Currently NAVTA recognizes 16 specialty academies (**TABLE 1**), and each has similar requirements for an individual to become eligible to apply for certification. The requirements include gaining experience in the specialty field for 3 to 5 years after becoming a credentialed veterinary technician, showing mastery in core skills specified as specialty skills by the academy, completing a case log with over 40 to 50 cases related to the specialty field the year preceding the application, submitting detailed case reports on several of these cases, obtaining letters of recommendations, and some additional requirements.

Once the application is accepted, passing the specialty exam is required in order to become certified as a VTS. Because of the rigorous requirements, the decision to attain VTS certification is not made lightly. The motivation to pursue certification largely lies in commitment to the specialty field and dedication to patient care in raising standards of practice. Many VTS-certified technicians are placed in leadership roles with higher financial compensation, though this could reflect intrinsic motivation the individuals possess.

A couple of survey studies have indicated that VTS-certified individuals enjoy a significantly higher wage than non-VTS veterinary technicians. In 2007, the national average wage for veterinary technicians was \$13.90/hour while it was \$23.48/hour for VTS-certified individuals.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, the national average was \$15.27/hour for non-VTS veterinary technicians while it was \$23.50/hour for VTS-certified individuals.<sup>2</sup> Higher pay was associated with the VTS-certified

<sup>1</sup> Norkus CL. Labor market characteristics of veterinary technician specialists in 2007. *JAVMA*. 2009 Dec 1;235(11):1303-6.

<sup>2</sup> Norkus CL, Liss DJ, Leighton LS. Characteristics of the labor market for veterinary technician specialists in 2013. *JAVMA*. 2016 Jan 1;248(1):105-9.

**TABLE 1 NAVTA Recognized Specialty Academies (in order of establishment)**

SPECIALTY FIELD	GOVERNING ACADEMY
Emergency and Critical Care	Academy of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care Technicians (AVECCT)
Anesthesia	The Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Anesthesia and Analgesia (AVTAA)
Dentistry	The Academy of Veterinary Dental Technicians (AVDT)
Internal Medicine	Academy of Internal Medicine Veterinary Technicians (AIMVT)
Behavior	The Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (AVBT)
Equine Nursing	The Academy of Equine Veterinary Nursing Technicians (AEVNT)
Surgery	The Academy of Veterinary Surgical Technicians (AVST)
Zoo Medicine	The Academy of Veterinary Zoological Medicine Technicians (AVZMT)
Clinical Practice	The Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Clinical Practice (AVTCP)
Nutrition	The Academy of Veterinary Nutrition Technicians (AVNT)
Clinical Pathology	The Academy of Veterinary Clinical Pathology Technicians (AVCPT)
Dermatology	The Academy of Dermatology Veterinary Technicians (ADVDT)
Ophthalmology	Academy of Veterinary Ophthalmic Technicians (AVOT)
Lab Animal	The Academy of Laboratory Animal Veterinary Technicians and Nurses (ALAVTN)
Physical Rehabilitation	The Academy of Physical Rehabilitation Veterinary Technicians (APRVT)
Diagnostic Imaging	The Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Diagnostic Imaging (AVTDI)

individual being in a manager or supervisory role, working in referral or academic settings, having more than 4 years of VTS experience, and older age.

Individuals with VTS certifications often engage in activities leading to sharing of knowledge such as lecturing and training, authoring of articles and textbooks, creation of guidelines, and participation in organized veterinary medicine. Most VTSs agree that the journey is only the beginning of a lifelong commitment to continued learning, and the friends and colleagues gained along the way to drive the profession further forward are a major benefit.

Working toward the VTS certification requires commitment and hard work, but the effort will be worth it. The exceptional level of knowledge gained in your chosen field will allow you to provide better care for the patients and become an asset to the clinic. Veterinary technicians and nurses who have achieved VTS status are increasingly recognized globally, and achieving certification can also lead to career advancement.

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## WHAT IF THE SPECIALTY AREA OF INTEREST IS NOT RECOGNIZED?

If the area of specialty you are personally interested in is not established as a recognized academy of NAVTA, you may gather other members of the profession sharing the same interest to petition for an academy to be recognized. Jane



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Paquette, AS, LVMT, is an organizing committee member of the Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Diagnostic Imaging, and she summarized her thoughts on the process:

“When I first heard of technician specialties, I felt that diagnostic imaging would be a very important and much needed specialty. Diagnostic imaging is a major tool in disease diagnosis in veterinary medicine. I soon came in contact with other veterinary technicians working in radiology sections of other veterinary schools as well as specialty veterinary hospitals. From those contacts, a committee was formed to create a VTS in diagnostic imaging.

Diagnostic imaging is not just taking radiographs. It involves computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), fluoroscopy, nuclear medicine, and ultrasound. It also involves a good understanding of physics and radiation safety. This is the reason I wanted this VTS established. The process was long and tedious; however, I was hoping it would pay off in the end.

Since the members on the committee were from all over the U.S. and Canada, we used Skype for our meetings. We conferred with other technician specialists to get ideas of what we needed to do to get this going. It took us several years of meeting multiple times a year to get this VTS approved, but we were finally successful.

Our first official exam won't be until October 2019, and I'm retiring in June 2019, so I will not be recognized at my current job as a VTS(DI), but I have said all along that as long as this VTS is created, I will feel that I have contributed to the future of other veterinary technicians/nurses who want to become specialized in diagnostic imaging. I look forward to helping the VTS(DI) as a 'retired' specialist!”

The process of creating a VTS academy often takes a few years and takes commitment to the specialty. Starting with the Academy of Veterinary Emergency Critical Care Technicians established more than 20 years ago, veterinary technicians/nurses have expanded on our areas of expertise to elevate the profession further. What area will you dedicate your career to? **TVN**