



FIRST RESPONSE

Veterinary nurses provide a critical function via telehealth triage and consultations.



MEET THE AUTHOR

Sarah Rumble
*Rumpus Writing and Editing,
Denver, Colo.*

The Future of Veterinary Nursing

Veterinary nursing is facing a crisis of dissatisfaction. More than half of veterinary nurses leave the profession within the first 5 years, according to a National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) survey.¹ Another recent NAVTA survey revealed that only 39% of respondents were “highly satisfied” with their role, and only 60% would “probably” or “definitely” become a veterinary nurse again.²

Sarah Rumble is an award-winning writer and editor who has been covering veterinary topics since 2011 after earning a degree in communication from the University of Colorado. She owns Rumpus Writing and Editing, a Denver-based copywriting agency, and believes that if you don't ask for what you want, you'll never get it.

Syda Productions/shutterstock.com



But it doesn't have to be that way. NAVTA lists several recommendations for increasing retention in the industry, including increasing pay, addressing student loan debts, creating flexible schedules, increasing career opportunities, and more.² When it comes to expanding the role of veterinary nurses in the clinic and potentially opening the door for increased practice revenue, the COVID-19 pandemic may have presented an opportunity.

As clients are becoming more accustomed to digital services in every aspect of life, veterinary clinics will be able to expand their use of telehealth for a variety of services and appointments. Look to the future to see how veterinary nurses can shape their role in this changing environment and become a critical part of the veterinary team for improved satisfaction and patient outcomes.

SPEAK UP

Educating veterinarians and practice managers about the skills veterinary nurses possess and the financial benefits of expanding their responsibilities is a key piece of the veterinary nurse empowerment puzzle. And, oftentimes, you can be your best advocate.

“A veterinary nurse needs to be able to walk into a practice and say, ‘This is what I can do for you to free you up so you can make more money doing what you’re licensed to do. Let me do everything else so we can see twice as many cases, and we can generate more income.’ They lack the confidence to go into a hospital and say that,” says Paige Allen, RVT, assistant director for academic advising and recruitment at Purdue University College of Veterinary Medicine and president of the North American Veterinary Community.

Allen believes nurses need to be better educated on “soft skills” of communication so they can advocate for themselves. And telehealth presents the perfect occasion to start the conversation. **BOX 1** includes positive benefits of veterinary nurses stepping up via telehealth.

TELEHEALTH TASKS

While some veterinary practices have been testing telehealth for several years, the pandemic has forced the profession to jump in head first, and that has caused many practice owners to worry about entering uncharted waters. But, as a veterinary nurse, you can ensure your practice swims—not sinks—when it comes to telehealth.



As clients are becoming more accustomed to digital services in every aspect of life, veterinary clinics will be able to expand their use of telehealth for a variety of services and appointments.

Show just how valuable you are by taking the following ideas to your practice leadership.

Surgery Rechecks

“At my practice, I ask follow-up questions, have clients send photos, and evaluate incisions via telehealth—and if anything is abnormal, I upgrade it to a doctor telemedicine consult,” says Kayla Sandness, RVT. Sandness has worked for Monticello Animal Hospital—a one-doctor practice in Shawnee, Kansas—for nearly 7 years. “The practice owner trusts me to help meet our clients’ needs through telehealth.”

Teletriage

“A credentialed veterinary nurse could be the first person to interface with a client when they contact the hospital with concerns,” says Cheryl Good, DVM, owner and medical director of Dearborn Family Pet Care in Dearborn, Michigan, a founding member of the Veterinary Virtual Care Association, and the chief veterinary officer for the Bridge Club. Veterinary nurses can be the first point of contact and identify when a client needs an in-person appointment with the veterinarian. This simple step will save veterinarians time, allow them to focus on tasks that require their specialized skills, and elevate veterinary nurses as a familiar, expert voice for clients.

Follow-ups

“Instead of calling clients after an exam, I do follow-up rechecks through our asynchronous chat platform—I send a chat to see how the pet is doing,” explains Sandness, whose practice uses the Vet2Pet platform (vet2pet.com) for telehealth. The platform includes a hospital-branded app that



BOX 1

Making the Argument for Increased Responsibility

Combat Burnout and Improve Job Satisfaction

“I have never seen in veterinary medicine the burnout rates that I’m seeing right now,” explains Amy Newfield, CVT, VTS (ECC). When team members are empowered to take on additional responsibilities, they’ll feel trusted and valued, which will lead to increased job satisfaction.

Improve Efficiency

“I am able to put my skills to use in a variety of ways at the practice,” says Kayla Sandness, RVT. “It saves time, allows us to see more patients, and makes us more efficient overall. When we can communicate with clients through chat, it really cuts down on our incoming and outgoing phone calls.”

Improve the Client Experience

“I wanted to give my clients another option for connection

with the practice,” says Crista Wallis, DVM. “I felt guilty every time I had to turn someone away because I didn’t have time to take care of them that day. When my veterinary nurses can triage via telehealth while I’m busy with appointments, our practice is providing a level of service that clients love.”

Provide Flexibility

“Trusting my veterinary nurses and practicing telemedicine allows me to leave the 4 walls of my practice and not feel guilty about it, but still have access to my clients and my staff,” Dr. Wallis says. “There are times when we need help, and the veterinary nurses can help us, even if they’re not in the hospital. The remote tasks are really working well for everyone.”

Decrease the Physical Demands of the Job

Being a veterinary nurse is not easy on the human body. “A lot of older veterinary nurses will say, ‘I don’t know how much longer I can do this job,’ and that’s a shame,” says Newfield. “We need to support our veterinary nurses and offer opportunities that allow them to sit home for a day and do consultations or take calls from clients and point them in the right direction.”

Allow Practices to Be the Source of Information

“If someone has questions about their pet, I’d rather them go to a site where they can speak with a credentialed veterinary nurse or a licensed veterinarian and have a conversation and then decide what the best course of action is, rather than asking Dr. Google,” says Newfield.

allows the team to exchange chats, photos, and videos with clients on a schedule that works for the practice. They can also accept contactless payments through the app, which makes collecting payment for telemedicine and curbside visits convenient.

Ongoing Patient Monitoring and Client Education

“There’s a lot that goes into the treatment and monitoring of certain chronic diseases, like diabetes,” says Dr. Good. “Instead of the veterinarian being involved on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis with the client, why not allow the veterinary nurse to guide the client, help explain how to give injections or do blood monitoring at home? That can be done via telehealth.”

Consultations

“Nutrition, behavior, or other consultations can be handled by credentialed veterinary nurses via telehealth,” says Dr. Good, whose team uses TeleTails ([teletails.com](https://www.teletails.com)), which allows them to offer both live and asynchronous video consultations.

Amy Newfield, CVT, VTS (ECC), project manager of training and health and wellbeing for BluePearl Veterinary Partners, agrees. “When pet owners have

Telehealth will be a major part of veterinary medicine moving forward, and many of these capabilities are a part of the everyday routine for many veterinary professionals already.



problems, the ability to have consultations over the phone can really reduce the number of urgent care visits,” she says. “Can it wait until an appointment is available with their primary veterinarian, or is an ER visit necessary?”

Remote Collaboration

“If I’m not in the hospital, clients can still drop their pets off after I’ve triaged them, and the veterinary nurses can run any diagnostic tests for me and then send the results to me so I can gauge what needs to be done next,” explains Crista Wallis, DVM, owner of Monticello Animal Hospital. “I love that [Sandness] and the team can be doing what I need them to do in the hospital and inform me of anything I need to know via telemedicine when I’m not there.”

Remote Tasks

One of Sandness’ colleagues has young children, and she needs to leave early in the day, so Dr. Wallis has set up her phone system so the veterinary nurse can answer the phones from her home. She can remotely sign-in to the practice management system and handle appointment confirmations, reminders, prescription refill requests, and more. Sandness monitors chat feeds through the practice’s app from her home, and she gets a bonus for the days she covers the after-hours chat triage, whether chats come in or not.

IS TELEHEALTH IN YOUR FUTURE?

Telehealth will be a major part of veterinary medicine moving forward, and many of these capabilities are a part of the everyday routine for many veterinary professionals already. As the technology is refined and more practices adopt these tools, new opportunities will arise. Make sure you understand your place in these developments, explore the many opportunities in veterinary telehealth, and advocate for yourself to expand your role on the veterinary team. **TVN**

References

1. National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America. NAVTA 2016 Demographic Survey Results. cdn.ymaws.com/www.navta.net/resource/resmgr/docs/2016_demographic_results.pdf. Accessed March 25, 2021.
2. National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America. NAVTA-Merck survey: Vet techs satisfied with career, but lots of room for improvement. cdn.ymaws.com/www.navta.net/resource/resmgr/media/2021_tnj/TNJ_2021-Feb-March_final_web.pdf. Accessed March 25, 2021.

Become an Animal Advocate Today!



embrace

AN NAVC ANIMAL COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

NAVC.com/embrace