



**PACK YOUR BAGS** Military personnel often move every 2 to 3 years, creating difficulties for their spouses to find new employment.



**MEET THE AUTHOR**

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# Veterinary Nursing as a Military Spouse

**I will never forget the day my dreams crumbled** around me. My husband's orders had been changed for the third time within a year and I had to start my career planning from scratch yet again. It was March of 2019 and I had been trying to establish my zoo career in the San Diego area. I had traveled over 120 miles 5 days a week for years to earn my associate degree and RVT license, all while working as an unpaid intern at Lions Tigers & Bears sanctuary, the San Diego Zoo, and the San Diego Zoo Safari Park.

Caitlin is a military spouse of 6 years to an active duty Marine and currently stationed with her husband in Okinawa, Japan. She graduated with her AAS degree in veterinary technology in 2018 and has recently graduated with her BAS in veterinary nursing. She now serves as a member of the Red Cross in the prefecture of Okinawa where she provides veterinary aid during natural disasters, such as seasonal typhoons. Caitlin is also pursuing a master's degree in veterinary medical sciences online at the University of Florida.

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I had even been offered the opportunity to study abroad in South Africa, but that was all coming to a halt due to the extreme nature of his new orders. Within the next 4 months, my husband and I were expected to move across the globe to Okinawa, Japan. Where would my career go in a country I did not have a license to practice in, let alone speak the language? How would I explain the 3-year gap in my resume? And how would I keep my veterinary nursing skills sharp over such a prolonged period of time? Sadly, I was not the only one who found themselves asking these questions.

Military spouses are often overlooked when it comes to career opportunities. In a survey of more than 11 000 service members, spouses, and veterans, employment ranked as the top issue for military spouses, and 77% of the military spouse respondents reported being underemployed.<sup>1</sup> Many assume that because their significant other is active duty that they've chosen to forgo a career in their own profession. Well, I am here to tell you that that is simply not the case. There are many military spouses who are either already credentialed veterinary technicians or students on their way to becoming one. However, we face a major hurdle when it comes to job opportunities between moves. Military families can move as often as once a year, which makes career transitions nearly impossible, and employers can legally discriminate against military spouses in fears of frequent moves. If your partner is in the military or is considering that path, it is important to understand how to identify scholarships (**BOX 1**), transfer licensure, and find opportunities overseas.

## EMPLOYMENT TIPS

Thankfully, there are many ways to navigate these waters. Resources such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Military Spouse Program offers career development and networking resources.<sup>2</sup> There are also many ways to remain active in the veterinary community without being hired, creating opportunities to fill gaps on your resume. These include earning veterinary certifications, completing continuing education (CE) hours, returning to school to upgrade a degree, volunteering at local animal facilities, or guest speaking at veterinary nursing schools or CE events. Be proactive by looking into hospitals near your spouse's next intended duty station, even if the location isn't guaranteed yet. Then, collect information and network by joining the state's technician association or following their social media pages.

Keep in mind when applying to a new hospital that there are several key assets one has as a military spouse that are vital to employers and essential to mention when being interviewed. We can turn acquaintances into friends at the drop of a hat, we are used to the hustle and bustle while maintaining a strict schedule, "pressure" is practically our middle name, we are quick to learn the ropes, and we can heavily relate to and better explain issues military clients and their pets may face. Looking into employment at large companies such as VCA Animal Hospitals or Banfield Pet Hospitals can, additionally, prove to be beneficial due to the helpful ability to relocate to another practice upon request.<sup>3,4</sup> Although this does not typically include aid

### BOX 1

#### Military Spouse Scholarships

##### Air Force Aid Society

- [afas.org/haparnoldgrant](https://afas.org/haparnoldgrant)
- **Amount:** \$500 to \$4000
- **Available to Spouses of:** All Ranks
- **Use:** Annual

##### My Career Advancement Account

- [mycaa.militaryonesource.mil](https://mycaa.militaryonesource.mil)
- **Amount:** \$4000
- **Available to Spouses of:** E-5 & below; W-1 to W-2; O-2 and below
- **Use:** Once (year-round availability)

##### National Military Family Association

- [militaryfamily.org/programs/spouses-scholarships](https://militaryfamily.org/programs/spouses-scholarships)
- **Amount:** Varies
- **Available to Spouses of:** E-5 and below; W-1 to W-2; O-2 and below
- **Use:** Annual (also has CE and license fee grants)

##### Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

- [nmcrs.org/pages/education-loans-and-scholarships](https://nmcrs.org/pages/education-loans-and-scholarships)
- **Amount:** \$500 to \$3000
- **Available to Spouses of:** E-5 & below; W-1 to W-2; O-2 and below
- **Use:** Annual

##### ThanksUSA

- [thanksusa.org/scholarships.html](https://thanksusa.org/scholarships.html)
- **Amount:** Less than \$3000
- **Available to Spouses of:** E-5 & below; W-1 to W-2; O-2 and below
- **Use:** Annual



in regard to transferring a license to another state, it does provide the guarantee of occupation—so long as a position is open—in a location much closer to your partner’s next intended duty station (within the United States). Lastly, always try to inform your potential employer of your estimated move time frame, if possible. Management will greatly appreciate this honesty and be able to plan accordingly, therefore increasing your chances of hire.

## EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIPS

As a military spouse and daughter of 2 former active duty personnel, I know one fact that constantly holds true to the armed forces: you are always on a schedule. The good news is, no matter where you are, there will constantly be a need for a credentialed veterinary nurse/technician. There are many online schools as well as accelerated programs that are better suited for military spouses to become qualified throughout the woes of moving. Plus, military spouses have many scholarship opportunities available to them due to their

circumstantial hardships. Most of these awards can be found through a simple Google search with the words “military spouse scholarship.” However, some bases and active duty units offer their own versions of grant opportunities to student spouses, so don’t be afraid to ask your significant other or their higher-ups at the next family event. They may even be listed in a base-wide newsletter, social media page, or email. When researching a school, always check whether it is accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) because the key factor to earning a license and possibly transferring it will rely on that matter. Plus, if you come to the point where you find the need to transfer, most programs will not accept your prior classes if the school is not AVMA accredited. Colleges typically list if they are accredited on their program’s overview page. But if you are having trouble finding it, you can always reach out to the school and ask or check the AVMA’s website.<sup>5</sup> **BOX 2** lists examples of military-friendly veterinary nursing programs.

### BOX 2

#### AVMA-CVTEA Accredited Veterinary Technology Programs

##### Online<sup>6</sup>

- Ashworth College, Norcross, Ga.
- Colby Community College, Colby, Kan.
- Dallas College, Lancaster, Texas
- Jefferson State Community College, Birmingham, Ala.
- Medaille College, Buffalo, N.Y.
- Northern Virginia Community College, Sterling, Va.
- Penn Foster College, Scottsdale, Ariz.
- Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind.
- St. Petersburg College, Largo, Fla.
- San Juan College, Farmington, N.M.

##### Accelerated

- Distance Education Veterinary Technology Program, Dallas College, Lancaster, Texas
- Penn Foster College, Scottsdale, Ariz.
- Pima Medical Institute (all campuses)

## TRANSFERRING AND RELOCATION

Once you have become licensed and face an upcoming PCS (permanent change of station), look up the veterinary laws and requirements in your next state. Follow the chart provided at [todaysveterinarynurse.com/military-spouse-technician](http://todaysveterinarynurse.com/military-spouse-technician) for a breakdown of the requirements in every state. Some of the most common requirements are a completed state application form, payment of an application fee, proof of education, and transferred Veterinary Technician National Exam (VTNE) scores from the American Association of Veterinary State Boards (AAVSB). Don’t be afraid to reach out to the state’s veterinary medical board or technician association for help in the process of transferring, and ask if there is additional aid provided for military spouses. If you and your family have received orders overseas, you will always have the ability to work under the full extent of your prior licensure once hired at a U.S. Army Veterinary Facility. These hospitals are required to be built anywhere U.S. military animals are used to ensure their safety and health. U.S. military animals are subsequently required on every U.S. military base throughout the world. By visiting [usajobs.gov](http://usajobs.gov), you can apply for an “Animal Health Technician” or “Assistant” position; if you are hired, such positions will include a Department of Defense (DoD) contract, thus allowing you to practice under the same laws as your most recently licensed state. You are only allowed to perform these tasks within said hospital, which will technically be located

on “rented” U.S. foreign soil. Therefore, whatever scope of practice your CVT, LVT, or RVT license describes are the same tasks the DoD will allow you to perform. If you are having trouble locating a job listing in your area while overseas, you can narrow the search by entering your designated base’s location, such as Armed Forces of the Americas (AA), Armed Forces of Europe (AE), or Armed Forces of the Pacific (AP).

## SUPPORT THE VNI

Human nurses are allotted the ability to transfer their registration to any state in which their active-duty spouse is stationed. However, veterinary nurses/technicians are not so lucky. This is due to the extent of varying requirements, titles, and scope of practice between each state. Each state currently acts within its own guidelines, with no coordination, and are continuously subject to change. Currently, transferring credentials as a veterinary nurse/technician is a hassle and can become costly when you are repetitively paying \$100 for the AAVSB to transfer your VTNE scores on top of a state application fee. Excessive variance in state laws, and therefore exams, can additionally prove strenuous on military spouses when moving to a third or fourth state within 3 years. Moreover, the entire process is time consuming for anyone trying to transfer. However, thanks to the efforts of the Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI) to shine a light on these issues, I hope to one day see the same flexibility afforded human nurses available to us. If you are interested in supporting this cause, reach out to your local veterinary board to find ways you can help support the VNI and visit [veterinarynurse.org](http://veterinarynurse.org). **TVN**

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