



CAREER ADVANCEMENT

The Importance of Onboarding

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When you start a new position at a practice, you will partake in an onboarding process. Managers typically start this process by conducting an orientation, during which you will complete all of the necessary new-hire paperwork, initiate benefits, and review hospital policies and procedures.



It is vital that you start off with a good understanding of the hospital's goals, how they are achieved, and the expectations of you and of the team as a whole.



Onboarding is also a crucial time to prepare you for successful integration into the hospital team. You will learn about communication channels and workflow and also get to know your coworkers so that you can become part of the team.

HOSPITAL CULTURE AND TEAM

A discussion of hospital culture is perhaps one of the most important aspects of onboarding. It is vital that you start off with a good understanding of the hospital's goals, how they are achieved, and the expectations of you and your team as a whole.

Make time to get to know people on your immediate team, but also those who work in other areas of the hospital. The sooner everyone knows who you are and that you're willing to learn and help, the smoother your experience will be, and the sooner you will feel a part of the group.

NEW EMPLOYEE PAPERWORK

New jobs come with tons of forms (paper or electronic). Managers typically have a checklist of what they need in order to enter you into the payroll and benefits systems, but it certainly doesn't hurt to check to make sure you have submitted everything needed to get you paid on time and set up to do your job.

Benefits

You should be given information as to what your benefits are, when you are eligible, and when you need to enroll or sign up. It is not too early to ask about benefits so that you can take full advantage of them and ensure you do not miss any important deadlines. To read more on this topic, visit the *Today's Veterinary Nurse* Winter 2023 article on "Understanding Employee Benefits" at bit.ly/3VEFZzl.

POLICIES, PROTOCOLS, AND PROCEDURES

Many managers provide an overview of the employee handbook, covering important topics. Make sure you take the time to read any manuals you are provided and ask questions as needed to clarify any gray areas. As an employee, you are expected to follow hospital protocols; therefore, it is important that you have a full understanding of what is expected.

TIMEKEEPING, PAY PERIODS, AND PAYDAYS

Timekeeping procedures will be covered early. Make sure all of your questions are answered, such as what to do if you forget to punch in or make a mistake, what the lunch and break schedules are, when and where the shift schedule will be posted, and how to request time off.

Be sure you understand what days you are being paid for and when to expect your paycheck. There is usually a lag time, often of several days, between the end of the pay period and your paycheck. If direct deposit is offered, it is recommended that you sign up for it so that your pay is in your account on time and not dependent on you making it to the hospital to collect a paycheck and get it to the bank.

Whether you choose direct deposit, paper check, or another method, review your first paystub closely and make sure you understand how to read your pay, deductions, earned time off, and so forth. It is a great habit to look at every check you receive; sometimes mistakes happen and the sooner you catch them, the sooner the errors can be fixed.

LOCATION

A hospital tour on your first day will provide you the basics of where to park, which bathroom to use, and the break room location. As needed, you will be provided with code or key access to the building, system passwords, and safe combinations.

Onboarding is a time to learn the location of safety equipment, fire extinguishers, the crash cart, supplies, and so on. If you have time during your first couple of days, open drawers and cabinets or offer to help with restocks so that you learn where things belong and can find them quickly. Think about supplies you might need quickly—endotracheal tubes, ECG leads, oxygen hookups, IV catheters, reversal agents, and more.



Familiarize yourself with equipment too, including light switches (overhead and exam table lights), fans, scavenge systems, clippers, stretchers, patient scales, and the like.

Questions to ask include: Where are clients checked out? Where are dogs to be walked? Is there a dedicated place for euthanasia?

JOB RESPONSIBILITIES

You likely received a job description during the interview process. Make sure you have intimate knowledge of any tasks, checklists, or other duties for which you are responsible. Find out if cross-training is part of the hospital culture, and if so, inquire as to when it will occur.

TRAINING AND MENTORSHIP

Safety and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) procedures should be covered right off the bat; this is usually the first part of a training program. Some hospitals will have a dedicated safety coordinator, while others will utilize a team approach. Learn who your go-to person is for safety questions and who to notify of a work-related injury should you ever need to do so.

Job training should be at least somewhat structured; usually this is arranged during onboarding. You should be given a clear idea of who your trainer is and what you are to do during your first couple of weeks. Some hospitals have formalized training while others have a more “learn-as-you-go” process. Either way, be sure you receive enough direction so that you know who to check in with when you arrive and what your focus is.

Find out if there is a formalized mentorship program. If not, you may need to seek out your own mentors. Make connections with coworkers to determine who you are comfortable going to with questions. Hospitals tend to be big, busy places, but a good mentor will still take the time to explain and will remember what it was like when they were new to the team.

WHAT TO ASK

1. What are the various communication channels?

Communication channels should be clearly defined. Who are your go-to people for scheduling questions, vacation requests, or training needs? How are lunches

and breaks organized? Who do you contact if you are running late or need to call out sick? Who is your sounding board for ideas, suggestions, or concerns? Questions on hospital protocols? When and where are department and staff meetings? When is a good time to talk with your manager? Does the team do morning huddles or daily rounds?

2. What is the hospital's mission?

Ask about culture. What is the philosophy on resolving interpersonal conflicts? What are the goals of the hospital and how can you contribute to those?

3. What are your goals for 30 days, 90 days, 1 year?

An organized manager or supervisor should be able to clearly lay this out so that you know what you are working toward. What should you be able to do or have accomplished at these milestones? When will you be given feedback on how you are doing? Make notes of these timeframes and check back with your manager when you reach these points.

CONCLUSION

Onboarding is so much more than just paperwork. Jump in to get the knowledge and resources you need to be successful in your job and with your team. **TVN**



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Founder and president of Starpath Consulting LLC, Carolyn has an insider's perspective from more than 20 years in the veterinary profession as a CVT, practice manager, HR director, HR partner, and HR consultant. Carolyn's deep understanding of veterinary team dynamics is the foundation for Starpath Consulting LLC, which provides veterinary-focused HR support. Carolyn is a Colorado native, and she is grateful for the blue skies, Rocky Mountain views, and sunshine. She lives in southwest Denver with her family and 3 dogs. Carolyn is passionate about veterinary practice culture and empowering hospital teams. She offers résumé review and individual coaching services; see details at starpathconsulting.com.