How often have you wished you could ask your patient what is wrong, where it hurts, or what happened? Despite many years of radiation exposure (while following ALARA [as low as reasonably achievable], of course!), we have not yet developed the supernatural abilities to make that possible. Without those abilities, diagnostic imaging is the best tool we can use to bridge the communication barrier.
The modalities available for diagnostic imaging allow us to see what is happening inside of our patients. We can use radiographs to see if a patient ingested something it should not have or perform ultrasonography to better visualize a nodule on the spleen. We can perform computed tomography (CT) to check for the presence of lung metastasis not yet visible on other modalities or we can use magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to evaluate a ruptured disc in a patient’s spinal column. The possibilities of diagnostics within imaging are endless and can help our patient’s healthcare team come a step closer to identifying what is truly ailing them. Having the best possible tool in lieu of the superpower of talking to our patients is one of many reasons we chose to pursue credentialing as a VTS in diagnostic imaging.

Veterinary nurses with this specialty are dedicated to performing a higher level of diagnostic imaging in radiography, fluoroscopy, CT (FIGURE 1), MRI, ultrasonography, and nuclear medicine. This specialty is one of the newest available to veterinary nurses. The American College of Veterinary Radiology (ACVR) executive committee first officially supported the formation of the VTS in diagnostic imaging in 2016 and it was formally accepted by NAVTA in 2018. In 2020, the first set of applicants earned their VTS credentials in diagnostic imaging.

**PREAPPLICATION ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS**

The first step in obtaining a VTS in diagnostic imaging credential is meeting all the requirements for the preapplication, which are due October 1 of odd-numbered years. The requirements are as follows:

- Graduate from an educational program in veterinary technology accredited by the AVMA or the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) and/or become credentialed to practice.
- Acquire 5 years/10,000 hours of work experience or its equivalent in the field of veterinary medicine with 75% (7500 hours) of that work experience dedicated in the field of diagnostic imaging (clinical or research-based).
- Earn at least 40 RACE-approved continuing education (CE) hours related to veterinary diagnostic imaging and advanced imaging modalities within 7 years prior, with 10 of those hours acquired within the year of preapplication submission. Lecture or lab providers for CE courses must be a diplomate of the ACVR or European College of Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging (ECVDI), a third-year ACVR/ECVDI resident, an Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Diagnostic Imaging (AVTDI) member, a DVM who is a boarded specialist who performs advanced imaging modalities, or a credentialed VTS veterinary nurse.
Christy DeYoung

Christy has been a veterinary nurse in the diagnostic imaging department at Purdue University for almost 15 years. After graduating from Purdue in 2006 with a bachelor’s degree in veterinary technology, she moved back to her home state of Michigan to work at an equine ambulatory practice before moving back to Purdue to join the diagnostic imaging team and has been a proud boilermaker ever since. She enjoys diagnostic imaging because it gives her the opportunity to provide care for both large and small animals and the ability to work with all the modalities in imaging. She has been a member of the Academy of Veterinary Technicians in Diagnostic Imaging (AVTDI) since 2020 and currently serves on the credentials approval committee, examination committee, recertification committee, and international/non-U.S./foreign credentialing requirements subcommittee. In her spare time, she enjoys exercising, horseback riding, reading, and spending time with her friends, family, and cat Lily.

Heidi Mast

Heidi began her veterinary medicine career working in emergency medicine at a local specialty clinic. After working in emergency medicine and then surgery, she found her passion in diagnostic imaging and helping all areas of the hospital find answers for their patients. Heidi was among the first class of graduates from the AVTDI once it became a NAVTA-approved specialty academy. After 9 years in specialty medicine, Heidi moved to general practice, where she shares her love for imaging and veterinary medicine with other veterinary nurses. Heidi lives in Idaho with her husband and 2 human kids. They have horses, goats, chickens, house birds, dogs, and cats that keep her busy when she isn’t at work.

Lydia Trott

Lydia is a 2009 graduate of Purdue University’s bachelor’s degree program in veterinary technology, where she then began her career in critical care and surgery at Purdue’s Large Animal Hospital before moving to the diagnostic imaging department in 2015. Her daily duties include performing advanced imaging exams on small, exotic, and large animal patients. She has been a member of the AVTDI since 2020 and currently serves as chair of the credentials committee and a member-at-large on the executive board. Lydia is also an accomplished ultra-cyclist with Randonneurs USA, completing prestigious events such as London-Edinburgh-London and Paris-Brest-Paris. When she’s not on the bike she enjoys camping with her husband, reading a good book on the couch surrounded by her 6 cats, or taking the llamas (2) and dogs (2) down to the creek for a swim.

nurse/technician who performs diagnostic imaging studies and/or advanced imaging studies. Nonveterinary CE (limit 5 hours) obtained from human CE (such as MRI or CT basics) must be American Registry of Radiologic Technologists–approved category A or A+.

- Submit 2 letters of recommendation from an AVTDI member, a DACVR/ECVDI, a third-year ACVR/ECVDI resident, a diplomate of an AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty college, or a member of another NAVTA-approved VTS academy.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Preapplications, submitted electronically, are reviewed by the credentials approval committee. Candidates are notified within 30 days if their preapplication was approved or denied.

Applicants with approved preapplications can move forward on meeting the requirements for the final application. Final applications are due February 1st of even-numbered years (4 months after preapplication submission). Requirements for final applications are as follows:

- Completion of the veterinary diagnostic imaging skills list form. Skills must be mastered within 5 years prior to submitting the final application and verified by approved signers (same personnel qualifying for approved CE). The form documents that skills have not been simply performed but mastered by the candidate and are necessary to practice as a veterinary nurse at an advanced level in the field of diagnostic imaging.

- Submission of a minimum of 45 (maximum of 60) case logs, each representing a different skill and reflecting mastery of general radiology knowledge and advanced imaging skills. Cases must be from within 1 year preceding the submission of the final application and include at least 2 different species.

- Submission of 6 detailed case reports demonstrating expertise in management of imaging clinical cases. These are a more in-depth description of a case from a case log and must also be from a case within 1 year preceding the submission of the final application. Case reports must contain 2 to 5 anonymized digital images representative of the imaging study and include at least 2 different species.

- Submission of 5 examination questions with corresponding answers for potential future examination use.
Final applications, submitted electronically, are reviewed by credentials committee members using a standardized rubric. Candidates are notified of their final application decision no less than 6 months preceding the exam. Approved candidates may sit for a proctored online exam. A minimum passing score is established each exam year by the examination committee and approved by the executive board. Candidates are notified within 60 days of the results of the exam. With a passing score, the candidate obtains their VTS in diagnostic imaging credential.

The cost associated with the entire process includes a $50 preapplication fee, a $50 final application fee, and a $150 examination fee. To maintain VTS in diagnostic imaging status, current members must pay annual dues (currently $50) and renew their annual NAVTA membership. Every 5 years, members must obtain a total of 50 hours or points, consisting of CE and demonstration of professional development in general radiology and advanced imaging techniques. Learn more at avtdi.org.

Achieving our VTS in diagnostic imaging credential gave us the ability to expand our knowledge and skills so that we can use imaging to help find answers for clients and provide the best care to all of our veterinary patients—from small to large to exotic. With the expanded knowledge and skill set, we have taken on new challenges and responsibilities, such as providing CE lectures and articles for fellow veterinary nurses. To continue to provide the best possible care to our patients, we will stay current in our field, learning newer imaging modalities and techniques that are rapidly changing as imaging technology becomes increasingly sophisticated. TVN