CAREER EXPLORATIONS

A Veterinary Nursing Career in Equine Field Service

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Growing up, I was not sure what I wanted to do professionally. I liked animals and enjoyed being outside. During high school, I worked and rode at a dressage barn and shadowed several large animal veterinarians. I went to college and obtained a degree in biology with the plan to go to veterinary school. I applied to several schools here in the United States, but I did not get in. I was accepted to St. George's University Foundation to Veterinary Medicine Program, a semester-long program where, if passed, one is accepted into St. George's School of Veterinary Medicine. I passed and was accepted into its veterinary school. However, I ultimately decided it did not make sense to take on that amount of debt. So, I took a job at a small animal practice while I figured out what to do next.

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THE ROAD TO EQUINE FIELD SERVICE

In my new role at a single-doctor practice, I did everything: receptionist, assistant, kennels, nursing care, inventory, anything that needed to be done. I learned a lot about efficiency, client communication, handling euthanasia, and managing inventory.

During my time at the clinic, I decided to enroll in the Penn Foster Vet Tech Program. I graduated, passed the Veterinary Technician National Examination, and ultimately decided to start looking for jobs in large animal, preferably ambulatory, practices. I applied for and was hired as a field service technician in 2019 and transitioned to solely equine field service in 2021.

As a veterinary nurse in equine field service, I travel with a veterinarian to provide care to equine patients where they are. I love the investigative part of my role, trying to figure out what is wrong with a patient or patients and what we can do to help. I also love being outdoors and interacting with owners and their horses in their own environment.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF EQUINE FIELD SERVICE

A typical day as a veterinary nurse in equine field service starts the previous evening. As I look ahead to the next day's schedule, I start to make a mental list of what I need to do in the morning before the doctor arrives and we head out for the day. Sometimes this is getting equipment, such as the shockwave or therapy laser, or extra supplies on the truck. If we are heading out to a large boarding facility, I might draw up vaccines ahead of time. In the morning, I will also restock and clean the truck from any emergencies during the night so that we can start the day organized and ready for the first call.

At the practice in which I work, I do the driving and the veterinarian does the billing, medical records, communicating with clients, and other administrative tasks during the drive. Some practices, however, will reverse those roles. Once we arrive at the appointment, I start setting up, which looks different depending on the type of call: dental, wellness, lameness, laceration, colic, etc. After I have everything set up, I assist in a variety of ways. I help our fourth-year veterinary students and veterinary nursing students with physical exams, administering vaccines and sedation, and clipping and scrubbing wounds. I will restrain for dentals, jog horses for lameness exams, and scrub for blocks and injections. Once we finish treatment, I work on getting everything cleaned and back on the truck while the doctor goes over instructions with the client. Then, we hit the road to our next call and repeat until finished. At the end of the day, I clean, disinfect, and restock the truck; submit lab work; charge batteries for equipment; and start preparing for the next day.

I am also on-call with the other veterinary nurses in our field service group. Occasionally, I end up out on a call during the night or weekend, which keeps things interesting. Some practices will have veterinary nurses on call for their field service work and some do not; therefore, it is a good question to ask when interviewing at a particular practice.

HOW TO GET INTO EQUINE/ LARGE ANIMAL FIELD SERVICE

If you are interested in pursuing a job in a large animal ambulatory practice, I would recommend volunteering or shadowing with large animal clinics to get experience and be willing to do any necessary task—veterinary nurses in ambulatory practice often handle multiple job duties such as receptionist, handler, and assistant.

It can also be beneficial to place your resume on job boards, such as that of the AVMA, and to send your resume to practices you would want to work for even if they do not have a job advertised. It shows initiative and interest, and they may contact you later when they do have an opening. Check veterinary school websites for jobs and be sure to ask those working in positions that you are interested in how they got there and if they have any leads on openings. Most of all, enjoy the opportunity to work in this area of the field. **TVN**

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Allison is a veterinary nurse for Purdue University's equine field service. She grew up in Pennsylvania and moved to Indiana in 2019. She has worked in the veterinary field for the last 9 years. She graduated with her B.S. degree in biology in 2012 from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania and her veterinary technician A.S. degree from Penn Foster in 2018. Outside of work she enjoys reading, baking, and hiking.