



NAVTA's Approved Veterinary Assistant Program Celebrates 15 Years



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Veterinarians and veterinary nurses/technicians work more efficiently and provide better patient care when supported in their endeavors by well-trained veterinary assistants. While veterinary nursing/technology training programs and colleges have been accredited for decades by the AVMA's Committee on Veterinary Technician Education and Activities (CVTEA), there was no formal program reviewing veterinary assistant training programs prior to 2010.

However, much to the dismay of credentialed veterinary technicians, certain veterinary assistant educational programs were training veterinary assistant students in skills considered within the scope of practice for credentialed veterinary technicians and out of scope for the noncredentialed veterinary assistant. Unfortunately, a few states supported this practice, and these states continue to provide no delineation between the positions of veterinary nurses/technicians and veterinary assistants.

These issues provided the impetus for NAVTA to convene a meeting of veterinary nursing educators in 2010 for the purpose of developing a program to review and recognize high-quality veterinary assistant training programs. NAVTA's Approved Veterinary Assistant (AVA) program came into fruition in 2011.

The year 2025 marks the 15th year of operation for NAVTA's AVA program. The founding committee members worked diligently throughout 2010 and 2011 to prepare guidelines for recognizing high-quality veterinary assistant training programs (navta.net/ava-program-guidelines). These guidelines included:

- Faculty standards requiring instruction by a licensed veterinarian and/or credentialed veterinary technician
- Required course/module and curriculum topics, including front office work and restraint of domestic species
- A review of facilities and supplies necessary for training the veterinary assistant
- Skills to demonstrate assistance in pharmacy, laboratory, surgical, and imaging procedures

NAVTA believes a specific set of skills is necessary for the veterinary assistant position. These skills are classified into 8 primary categories:

1. Office and hospital procedures
2. Communication and client relations
3. Pharmacy and pharmacology skills
4. Examination room procedures



5. Basic small animal nursing
6. Surgical preparation and assisting
7. Laboratory procedures
8. Radiography and ultrasonography

Other basic tasks may be added to the skills list but must not encroach on essential areas of study for veterinary nurses/technicians. Veterinary assistant training programs must emphasize the role of all members of the veterinary team and are responsible for educating both students and their potential employers on proper delegation to the veterinary assistant.

NAVTA's AVA program requires all veterinary assistant training programs to have 150 hours of classroom/lab education and an additional minimum of 100 hours' externship/clinical experience. AVA training programs must also have a letter of support from an AVMA CVTEA-accredited veterinary nursing/technology program.

The NAVTA AVA program currently recognizes more than 70 veterinary assistant training programs throughout the United States and Canada (see the full list at navta.net/veterinary-assistants-program/ava-programs). Half of these programs are high school programs at career and technical academies, representing some of the best vocational medical training offered at the secondary level. The remaining approved programs are offered through community colleges and postsecondary institutions, with 6 of these programs offered online or as hybrid. In all, 24 states and 1 Canadian province offer NAVTA AVA programs.

Thousands of students have completed these programs in the past 15 years and more than 2500 students have passed the NAVTA AVA Examination, which is administered by NAVTA's partner VetMedTeam. These graduates carry the designation of "NAVTA Approved Veterinary Assistant." (NAVTA is careful not to use the word "certified" to avoid confusion with states that credential veterinary technicians as "certified veterinary technicians.") NAVTA AVAs may renew their designation every 2 years by completing 10 hours of continuing education.

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Beware of Veterinary Assistant Review Courses

NAVTA is aware of the existence of several online testing review courses and practice tests identified as review for the "Approved Veterinary Assistant Exam." NAVTA neither approves of nor endorses any of these courses, practice tests, or online review questions purporting to prepare the test taker for the NAVTA AVA exam. The NAVTA AVA exam is a proprietary product, is owned by NAVTA, and has no sanctioned or approved study course other than the program itself. NAVTA firmly believes that graduates of approved programs are sufficiently prepared for success on the NAVTA AVA exam with proper studying and preparation.

NAVTA AVAs have a strong advantage when seeking employment and a high number are hired from their externship/clinical experience. Many of these NAVTA AVAs have furthered their education and become credentialed veterinary technicians. These NAVTA AVA graduates have cited the basic training received in their programs as instrumental in providing a foundation for their skills and confidence. Several NAVTA AVAs have also gone on to veterinary colleges to join the ranks of practicing veterinarians.

In May of 2023, NAVTA began a program of recognition and celebration of NAVTA AVAs with the first annual NAVTA AVA Day. In 2024, the day was expanded to a full week of celebration. In 2025, 8 distinguished NAVTA AVA program graduates were recognized by NAVTA with articles in NAVTA publications and on the NAVTA website and social media pages.

The NAVTA AVA program continues to expand and explore ways of recognizing the vital support position of veterinary assistant. The NAVTA AVA program will help provide well-trained veterinary assistants ready for employment and help to establish the increasing need for all levels of veterinary support personnel.

NAVTA thanks and recognizes the dedication and contributions of Dennis Lopez, MEd, LVT, FVTE, who has led the AVA Committee for years. Current members of the AVA Committee are Helen DeWitt (vice chair), Megan Chadwick, Betsy Hensley, Christina Melvin, Heather Milharcic, Lynn Roland, Oreta Samples, Erin Spencer, Stephanie Vuckovich, and Mandy Zachgo.

For more information about how to enroll in the NAVTA AVA program or how to become a NAVTA AVA program, visit navta.net/veterinary-assistants. **TVN**

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