

Veterinarian Encyclopedia Article

Veterinarian

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Veterinarian

Veterinarians are doctors who diagnose and treat the diseases and injuries of animals. Their duties vary depending on the specific type of practice or specialization. In North America, 80 percent of veterinarians are in private practice. The remaining 20 percent work at zoos, inspect meat and poultry for the federal or state government, teach at veterinary universities, or conduct research. When serving in the U.S. Army, Air Force, or Public Health Service, veterinarians are commissioned officers.

Veterinarians who practice general veterinary medicine are similar to family practitioners. They carry out a number of health services, including giving general checkups, administering tests and immunizations, and advising pet owners on feeding, exercising, and grooming. Veterinarians are called upon to perform routine spaying or neutering, as well as surgery to correct a health problem. Most veterinarians treat small animals and pets exclusively, but others specialize in larger animals such as cattle, horses, and sheep. Veterinarians usually have set office hours, although they may be called to take care of an emergency at any time. Large-animal veterinarians may also be required to visit a farm or ranch when an animal is injured, ill, or expected to give birth under difficult circumstances.

A veterinarian must get along with animals and should have an interest in science. There are a limited number of colleges of veterinary medicine in the United States, and entrance is competitive. Individuals must complete six years of college to receive a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.) degree. Coursework during the first two years emphasizes physical and biological science. The remaining four years involve classroom work; practical experience in diagnosing and treating animal diseases; surgery; lab courses in anatomy and biochemistry; and other scientific and medical studies. In addition, veterinarians are required to pass an examination in the state, including the District of Columbia, in which they wish to practice.

A veterinarian listens to this horse's heartbeat during a check-up.

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