

EQUINE VETERINARY TECHNICIAN GUIDELINES

Veterinary technicians are an integral part of equine veterinary practice. Current qualifications generate technicians with high skill levels who can complement veterinarians in the provision of balanced veterinary care. Veterinary practices using equine technicians can adopt a team approach to tasks. The shortage of veterinarians has been acutely felt in rural areas and has elevated the technician's role, which has highlighted the need to develop formal guidelines around standards of care and duties.

These guidelines are designed to provide structure in this area. With input from a wide range of stakeholders, including veterinary practices, technicians, regulators, educators and the insurance industry, these guidelines should ensure protection for veterinary practices, technicians and the public.

The Equine Veterinarians of the NZVA is indebted to the Dairy Cattle Veterinarians of the NZVA for allowing us to adapt its *Large Animal Veterinary Technician Professional Guidelines*.

About the Guidelines

These Guidelines set out the professional conduct and ethical standards expected of equine veterinary technicians (EVTs) and equine veterinary nurses (EVN). For the purposes of this document, the term EVT will encompass both technicians and nurses. While in many instances EVT's work alongside veterinarians (under direct supervision), there may be instances where EVT's provide service under the guidance of a veterinarian.

Every EVT has a responsibility to apply these standards to their care of horses and to the tasks they perform.

The Guidelines provide:

- general guidance for professional conduct of EVT's
- a set of principles that EVT's can apply to their decision making
- a set of standards that clients and the public can expect EVT's to abide by
- a set of standards of acceptable conduct that EVT's can be assessed against.

Status of these Guidelines

These Guidelines have been developed by the Equine Veterinarians of the NZVA (a special interest branch of the New Zealand Veterinary Association Te Pae Kīrehe) and the New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA). The guidelines have no legal status and apply to EVT's employed by veterinarians.

Definitions

EVT's are almost exclusively involved in the care of horses and are employed by equine veterinary practices or mixed animal practices. Most EVT's have a formal qualification, including but not limited to a:

- Bachelor of Veterinary Technology
- New Zealand Diploma in Veterinary Nursing
- Certificate in Rural Animal Technology.

Handling horses requires a special skill set, however, and many EVT's have acquired equine handling or riding skills as well as 'on the job' training through their employer.

Most EVTs perform duties either under direct and continuous supervision of a veterinarian (assisting the veterinarian) or indirect supervision (no veterinarian present but subject to training and regular assessment).

The scope of practice can include collecting specimens for laboratory tests, carrying out equine procedures such as bandage changes, giving medications, monitoring IV fluid administration, assisting with reproductive procedures, and assisting in surgical and other medical procedures.

EVTs must not:

- perform significant surgical procedures, other than those outlined under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 or Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018
- authorise restricted veterinary medicines.

They can, however, use restricted veterinary medicines under veterinary direction or supervision.

Structure of the Guidelines

The Guidelines have been structured around fundamental principles that form the basis of the professional behaviour expected of veterinarians. These principles are:

1. **Animal welfare:** Protecting animal welfare and alleviating animal suffering.
2. **Communication:** Practising in a way that promotes effective communication and trust, meets confidentiality and consent requirements, and recognises clients' right to choose.
3. **Professional integrity:** Interacting with colleagues honestly, respectfully, and in a way that fosters good relationships and communication.
4. **Professional service:** Acting in a manner that promotes the public's trust and confidence in veterinary technicians.
5. **Professional development:** Striving to provide a high standard of practice.
6. **Veterinary medicines:** Exercising sound professional judgment when dispensing and using veterinary medicines.
7. **Legal responsibilities:** Practicing in accordance with relevant legislation and other applicable standards.

Application of the Guidelines

These Guidelines identify the ethical principles of the EVT role, serving as a source of information and a basis for monitoring practice.

EVTs should make competent and reasonable decisions (in consultation with the supervising veterinarian where appropriate) about the most appropriate course of action considering the individual circumstances.

EVTs must exercise sound professional judgment in deciding the appropriate course of action and use the Guidelines as a basis for making that decision. In doing so, EVTs recognise that they work under veterinary supervision, and must follow the instructions of the supervising veterinarian.

Revision of these Guidelines

These Guidelines will be revised as required. They will be reviewed frequently due to any changes to the public's expectations or significant issues arising.

The role of the veterinarian

There should be a supervising veterinarian or veterinarians who are responsible for EVT's employed by the practice. If a veterinary technician is involved in an insurance claim, there must be a nominated supervising veterinarian responsible for EVT training in order for the claim to proceed.

Every supervising veterinarian will ensure that the EVT's do not breach the Veterinarians Act 2005 or any of its standards and guidance. Under the Act, EVT's are not permitted to call themselves veterinarians or imply that they are.

No veterinarian in the practice should allow an EVT to perform a procedure unless appropriately trained and/or supervised. The supervising veterinarian is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the technician has the appropriate training and skills to carry out the procedures they perform.

The supervising veterinarian will also provide or facilitate ongoing advice, guidance, supervision, continuing professional development (CPD) and assessment. The supervising veterinarian should follow a structured process for training and assessing ongoing competence of any supervised technician for all procedures carried out by the technician. In deciding whether to delegate a procedure to an EVT, the veterinarian must:

- ensure the health and welfare of the horse is appropriately managed
- be satisfied that all training requirements have been undertaken, and the EVT has been assessed and recorded as competent.

Veterinarians must ensure that only persons:

- approved under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 perform significant procedures
- approved under the Animal Welfare (Care and Procedures) Regulations 2018 perform approved specified surgical procedures.

The competence and conduct of the technician may result in the supervising veterinarian facing scrutiny by the Veterinary Council of New Zealand (VCNZ) or an increased insurance excess in the event of a claim with the Veterinary Professional Insurance Society (VPIS).

Fundamental principles

Animal welfare

EVT's must:

- make horses' welfare the primary consideration
- treat all horses humanely and with respect
- not cause any horse to suffer by:
 - excessive restraint or discipline
 - failing to assist with the maintenance of adequate pain relief and prevention of suffering,
 - neglect.
- not carry out any procedure where there is a risk of adverse consequences, unless appropriately trained and/or supervised by a veterinarian.

If an EVT has any concerns about the welfare of animals they are in contact with, they should relay these to the supervising veterinarian.

Professional services

EVT's must carry out a veterinarian's directions when assisting in the provision of veterinary care.

EVTs should:

- always provide a high level of care, using their professional skills
- always act in the interests of the horse
- always act in a way that justifies the trust and confidence of the public and upholds the good standing of the veterinary profession
- keep within their own areas of competence and contact a veterinarian immediately if they need assistance to provide emergency first aid.

Professional development

EVTs should:

- keep their skills and knowledge up to date
- continue their professional education by keeping up to date with general developments in veterinary technology, particularly in their area of professional activity
- maintain a record of their continuing professional development.

Communication

EVTs must maintain veterinarian and client confidentiality, including on social media channels and in visual media.

EVTs should:

- treat clients with respect and observe professional courtesies
- ensure the client is kept informed of all procedures and treatments (if treating a horse in the absence of a veterinarian)
- keep signed written records if informed consent is required
- ensure that the appropriate veterinarian is kept informed of all procedures and treatments (this is particularly important when there is a variation in outcome to what would normally be expected from a given procedure or treatment)
- facilitate communication between the veterinarian and the client when required, to assist the client's understanding of any issues relating to their horse's treatment or procedure.

Professional integrity

EVTs must:

- not take part in any illegal or unethical professional conduct
- always be trustworthy and honest
- uphold the reputation of EVT's
- use their status to provide only factual information to clients about veterinary services and products authorised for administration under supervising veterinarians' training
- never sign a veterinary certificate
- accurately represent any formal qualifications by using the correct postnominal letters.

EVTs should:

- give due consideration to the client's concerns and wishes when these do not conflict with the horse's welfare

- not suggest a diagnosis to the client
- co-operate with other health professionals when appropriate
- be prepared to explain and justify to clients or colleagues any action or decision taken during their professional activity
- not speak or write disparagingly about another professional colleague or client, including via social media channels.

Veterinary medicines

EVTs must:

- not prescribe restricted veterinary medicines (RVMs)
- comply with practice standard operating procedures (SOPs) when dispensing products or veterinary medicines
- ensure the client understands the correct method of use, route of administration, withholding times, and special precautions relevant to any veterinary medicine dispensed
- report any suspected adverse reactions to a veterinarian.

EVTs should refer to a veterinarian any situation where the technician believes RVMs should be prescribed.

Legal requirements

EVTs must be fully aware of, and abide by, all Acts and Regulations affecting them professionally.

Scope of practice

In general, EVT's will mostly be working with a veterinarian. Therefore, their scope of practice may be wider than detailed below and the needs of individual veterinary practices may dictate this scope.

EVTs are permitted to perform the following tasks (following appropriate training and supervision):

- Bandage changes
- Aseptic preparation
- Intramuscular and subcutaneous drug injection
- Vaccination
- Oral medication
- Blood and free catch urine sample collection
- Clinical examination and vital sign monitoring
- Dispensing prescriptions
- Completing medical records
- Blood and faecal egg count (FEC) sample processing.

EVTs may also complete the following tasks with an increased level of training and supervision, and at the discretion of the veterinary practice:

- Intravenous drug injection
- RVM use directed by a veterinarian
- IV fluid set up and administration, including placement of an IV catheter
- Gas and IV anaesthetic monitoring
- Setting up Constant Rate Infusion (CRI) sedation and monitoring
- Microchipping

- Artificial insemination (AI), including approving, monitoring handling, and preparing frozen semen stored for AI
- Surgical assisting
- Basic client education (eg deworming, wound care)
- Suture removal
- Passage of a nasogastric tube
- Taking radiographs under veterinarian supervision
- Semen collection under veterinary supervision using an artificial vagina
- Shock wave treatment under veterinary supervision
- McMaster FEC laboratory testing
- Plating swabs for culture/sensitivity
- Semen analysis
- Application of AW5 sarcoid cream
- Mesotherapy administration.

Other tasks may be added to this list at the veterinary practice's discretion, with appropriate training.

Training records

Training records (including annual review) for each EVT should be kept for at least five years. In the event of an insurance claim, records of training must be available for all duties undertaken by an EVT.

These records must include a description of the training, the name of the supervising veterinarian, the date of the training, an assessment of competency, and signatures of both the EVT and supervising veterinarian.

Training and records must be reviewed annually.

A record of external training is acceptable, provided the supervising veterinarian signs it off in the clinic training records for the technician.