

## An Introduction to Specialization in the Veterinary Technician Field

By: John Ganzar, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021.

The field of Veterinary Medicine is dynamic with new research being published regularly. It is vital for Veterinary Technicians to stay current with research and new learning opportunities to keep up with the changes in the field.

Because of growing interest among veterinary technicians to achieve a higher level of recognition for advanced knowledge and skills in specific disciplines, the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) developed the Committee on Veterinary Technician Specialties (CVTS).

CVTS was formed in 1994 and is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association. The CVTS provides guidelines to veterinary technician organizations to facilitate the formation of a specialty organization. Academies develop advanced pathways, which a candidate must follow and complete, to be awarded the designation of VTS (Veterinary Technician Specialist) in their specific discipline (NAVTA, 2021). Erin Henninger BA, CVT, VTS (ECC), Executive Director at the Colorado Association of Certified Veterinary Technicians (CACVT), explains “Obtaining a VTS is beneficial to the individual, their employer, and to our patients. VTS’s have an exceptional knowledge base they draw on when caring for animals and working as part of the veterinary treatment team. VTS’s are extremely valuable to the veterinary community because they provide the highest quality of care and can help take patient care to advanced levels”

There are currently 10 specialties that certified vet techs can work towards and reach with the proper credentials (linked below to the specific academy):

1. [Zoological Medicine](#)
2. [Anesthesia and Analgesia](#)
3. [Internal Medicine](#)
4. [Equine Nursing](#)
5. [Emergency and Critical Care](#)
6. [Dentistry](#)
7. [Clinical Pathology](#)
8. [Behavior](#)
9. [Clinical Practice](#)

## 10. [Nutrition](#)

Each one of the specialties has certain criteria and requirements applicants must have already attained to apply. Be sure to check with each individual academy on the credentialing requirements for application.

The specialization with the most members is the Emergency and Critical Care specialty. The requirements to become a member include the following steps:

“Within the past five years, and since graduating (from an AVMA accredited Vet Tech program) or becoming licensed, have you:

- Accumulated at least 5760 hours (3 years of full-time work experience) working in emergency and/or critical care?
- Completed a minimum of 25 hours of continuing education from nationally recognized programs, in the field of emergency and critical care?
- Evidence of mastery of advanced nursing skills related to emergency and critical care (found at [avecct.org](http://avecct.org))?
- A case record log of a minimum of 50 emergency and/or critical care cases from January 1 to December 31 of the year you are applying?
  
- Four case reports chosen from your case logs, that show your understanding of the patient’s condition and treatment, and demonstrate your role in their nursing management?
- Two letters of reference from one of the following: a VTS (ECC, SAIM, or Anes), VECCS member veterinarian, or board-certified veterinarian in ECC, IM, Anes or Surgery?” (AVECCT, 2021).

The academy has a study guide, over 400 pages, that you can purchase to help you study and ensure you stay on top of the critical information that defines that goals and mission of the academy, and in praxis.

The Internal Medicine specialty, which as of 2019 had 124 credential members requires these steps to earn the credentials (AIMVT, 2021):

- Graduate from a veterinary technician school.
  
- Complete the minimum work experience of three years and 6,000 hours as a credentialed vet tech in the field of Internal Medicine.
- Have a minimum of 40 hours of continuing education within Internal Medicine.
- Submit three potential examination questions.
- Provide two letters of recommendation.

This shows the additional steps necessary to become a VTS, as 6,000 hours in the field, specifically in Internal Medicine, is no small sum of hours.

Continuing education is also an important part of gaining membership to an academy. Bel-Rea offers monthly Continuing Education (CE) courses each month, usually around 3 CE hours. This means that if you attended only one per month, it would take 14 courses to get the minimum of 40 hours. Attending these courses is vital to keeping with local and national trends in the field, as research is continually published that challenges previously held notions of best practices. This only increases the quality of care that vet techs can provide if they stay on top of continuing education. This will allow you to learn more in-depth about part of the field, while gaining broad exposure on a macro-level to other parts. While it is difficult to predict what part of the field you specifically want to specialize in, if any, best practices are to try different sub-fields of veterinary medicine at the beginning of your career.

There are many reasons to get credentialed as a VTS. Henninger continues by explaining “going through the process of obtaining a VTS is very rigorous but totally worth it! I learned things I did not even know I did not know. The main factor in getting my VTS credentialing was that I wanted to be as prepared as possible to advocate for my patients and give them the best chance of recovering.” She recommends gaining a few years of experience before applying and going through the credentials process to ensure the area you choose is something you truly love. However! It is never too early to start networking and gaining insights into the specialties you may consider in the future, if only to lay the groundwork now.