

Vermont Veterinary Medical Association

Certified Veterinary Assistant™ (CVA)

POLICIES & GUIDELINES

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1.0 Introduction and Program Overview

Owner:

The Certified Veterinary Assistant™ program is a service of the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA), a 501(c) 6 not-for-profit professional association chartered by the State of Vermont and serving the needs of the veterinary profession and individual veterinarians in Vermont.

1.1 Background:

The CVA program has evolved from the awareness that training and career development are key attributes of successful veterinary practices. With this focus, the VVMA has adopted a formal program developed by the VVMA in partnership with the Texas VMA and Patterson Veterinary Academy to train and certify those individuals wishing to follow a career path as a Veterinary Assistant. This program has been implemented in hundreds of hospitals across the country and has resulted in over a thousand CVAs since its inception. The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association embraces the goals and objectives of this program recognizing CVAs in Vermont will benefit themselves, the profession, and the animals it serves.

1.2 Purpose and Mission:

The modern veterinary clinic depends on a knowledgeable and well-trained animal health-care team to deliver the quality medical services demanded by animal owners and required by the ever-advancing standards-of-care accepted within the veterinary profession. Well-established, high quality, formal educational programs exist to provide the education and training required by veterinarians and veterinary technicians. However, there has long existed a need to establish standards of competency and performance for individuals employed as veterinary assistants, the third member of the successful animal health-care team. The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association implements the Certified Veterinary Assistant™ program to help meet this need. It is the mission of the VVMA Certified Veterinary Assistant™ Program to establish knowledge and performance standards in the practice of veterinary assisting and to encourage the widespread adoption of these standards through a highly valued credential of competency.

1.3 Program Governance:

The Certified Veterinary Assistant™ Program in Vermont is operated by the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association in concert with its partners who originally developed the CVA certification and associated educational training. Any questions or concerns may be directed to the VVMA.

1.4 CVA and the Veterinary Health Care Team:

The modern veterinary clinic or hospital represents a highly complex, well-coordinated animal health-care environment. Every person on staff has a vital and specific role to play in caring for the patients entrusted to their care. The central components of a well-functioning animal health-care team include the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, assisted by the Credentialed Veterinary Technician, and supported by the Certified Veterinary Assistant™. Depending on specific circumstances, the exact deployment of these highly skilled individuals may vary from one health-care team to another, but these three working together represent the core to an efficient veterinary office. Other non-credentialed members of the veterinary staff also make many valuable contributions to the hospital function, but credentialed staff members are important to state-of-the-art veterinary care.

Levels of training, expertise, and responsibility naturally segment the animal health-care team along a hierarchy of medical authority with the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine accorded the highest rank within the team, followed by the Credentialed Veterinary Technician, and with the Certified Veterinary Assistant™ filling the third tier of authority and responsibility. Thus, the DVM is self-directed within the team and supervises and directs all other members of the team including the Credentialed Veterinary Technician and CVA members. With the doctor's approval, a Credentialed Veterinary Technician may be assigned some degree of oversight for the CVA team members. It is not best practice, nor is it the policy of the VVMA to suggest the use of a CVA to do those functions that should be reserved to the Credentialed Veterinary Technician. The training and capability of the CVA is considerably below that of a Credentialed Veterinary Technician and, while every practice owner will deploy staff as she or he deems best, it is highly recommended that one or more Credentialed Veterinary Technicians form the backbone of the support staff with able assistance provided by the CVA. The CVA is to follow all directions of the Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and/or Credentialed Veterinary Technicians who are working under supervision of the DVM/VMD and to not perform functions unless authorized to do so. The Vermont VMA is not responsible for the actions of the CVA while working under the supervision of a DVM and/or CVT.

The CVA program is a learn-on-the-job vocational training experience that covers the basic fundamentals of veterinary medicine and animal care and handling. The VVMA aspires through this program a veterinary practice in which the veterinarian, CVT, and CVA work together as valuable and highly productive members of a unified animal health-care team.

1.5 Benefits of Certification:

The Certified Veterinary Assistant™ receives a number of benefits as a result of certification in the VVMA program, including:

- **Certificate:** All successful applicants for certification as a CVA will receive a professional quality certificate designating the date and level of certification as well as the name of the certified individual.
- **Verification of Certification:** VVMA maintains a permanent registry of all CVA's who have completed and maintained their certification status and will respond to employer inquiries to verify an individual's certification.
- **Promotion of Certification as an Employer Benefit:** the VVMA will continually promote to its member veterinarians the value of employing certified veterinary assistants.

2.0 Certification Criteria and Eligibility Requirements

2.1 Certification Levels:

The CVA program consists of three levels of attainment, as follows:

- **CVA Level I:** Entry level skills and knowledge, roughly equivalent to 90 days of on-the-job training in a veterinary clinic.
- **CVA Level II:** Intermediate level skills and knowledge, roughly equivalent to 180 days of on- the- job training in a veterinary clinic beyond certification at CVA Level I.
- **CVA Level III:** Advanced level skills and knowledge, roughly equivalent to 180 days of on- the-job training in a veterinary clinic beyond certification at CVA Level II.
- All Certified Veterinary Assistants™ must progress through each certification step in sequence, that is, all CVAs must certify first at Level I, then go on to Level II, then Level III in sequence.

2.2 Eligibility Criteria and Requirements:

The eligibility criteria and requirements for certification established for each of the three levels of CVA certification are as follows:

CVA Level I:

- Applicant must be at least 16 years of age
- Applicant must have obtained 90 days of practical work experience (equivalent to 500 hours, paid or volunteer) in a veterinary setting under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a credentialed veterinary technician
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level I certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)

- Completed CVA Level I “Skills Validation Checklist”
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level I certification exam

CVA Level II:

- Applicant must hold a valid CVA Level I certification
- Applicant must have obtained 180 days of practical work experience (equivalent to 1,000 hours, paid or volunteer) under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a credentialed veterinary technician, counted from the date initial certification at CVA Level I was awarded (see section 3.3 for exception).
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level II certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)
- Completed CVA Level II “Skills Validation Checklist”
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level II certification exam

CVA Level III:

- Applicant must hold a valid CVA Level II certification
- Applicant must have obtained 180 days of practical work experience (equivalent to 1,000 hours, paid or volunteer) under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian or a credentialed veterinary technician, counted from the date initial certification at CVA Level II was awarded (see section 3.3 for exception).
- Applicant must submit a completed application for examination for CVA Level III certification including complete payment of examination fee(s)
- Completed CVA Level III “Skills Validation Checklist”
- Applicant must score 70% or better on the CVA Level III certification examination

3.0 Program Organization

The CVA program consists of three core components, which are included in every level of certification as outlined above: Knowledge, Skills, and Experience.

3.1 Knowledge Standards

The knowledge standards established for the VVMA Certified Veterinary Assistant™ are expressed in terms of minimum competencies which must be demonstrated by the candidates for certification at each of three certification levels. The competencies are subdivided into ten knowledge domains that together span the range of work typically assigned to the veterinary assistant in a professional practice of veterinary medicine. These competencies and their assignment to appropriate certification levels are presented in Appendix A for each knowledge domain.

3.2 Acceptable Learning Formats for Achieving Knowledge Standards

The Certified Veterinary Assistant™ Program is a credentialing process, not an educational program. It serves to define the basic knowledge and skills required for successful work as a veterinary assistant and to grant the CVA credential in recognition of demonstrated performance capabilities meeting or exceeding established standards. There are various routes recognized by VVMA for gaining the knowledge required for certification, which may include but are not limited to: on- the -job training (see below for specific requirements related to high schools participating in the program), formal education programs (i.e. Vermont CTE programs, college agricultural and animal science programs), and seminars and workshops for addendum training. A full program of educational and training activities available online through Patterson Veterinary Academy, which includes online testing and skills validation, is recognized by the VVMA as a valid option for completing CVA certification, provided the work experience and supervision requirements are met.

High school student provisions: School-based programs certify at CVA Level I only. Level I certification examinations may be taken at the place of schooling/training and will be administered by the teacher of record. In this case, the examination will be given at the conclusion of training, provided all other requirements have been met.

3.3 Skills Standards:

Each candidate for certification must acquire specified skills and performance abilities appropriate to the certification level sought. These skills and performance abilities must be validated and confirmed by a licensed veterinarian or a credentialed veterinary technician. The CVA program relies upon observation and supervision by appropriate professional personnel to assure appropriate skill levels in the veterinary assistants achieving certification. This is accomplished through the "Skills Validation Checklist", which must be completed and signed by an immediate supervisor who is either a DVM or CVT. Digital submission of the "Skills Validation Checklist" is recommended through the VVMA-approved online program provided by Patterson Veterinary Academy. The skills required for each certification level are presented in Appendix 3.

3.4 Experience Standards

Certification at any CVA level requires demonstrated proficiency of work-related tasks in an appropriate environment, which is to be a veterinary hospital or its equivalent. The hours required for each level of certification are outlined in section 2.02 and summarized here:

CVA I: 500 hours

CVA II: Additional 1,000 hours

CVA III: Additional 1,000 hours

****It should be noted that these hours are cumulative, i.e. each subsequent level's experience requirement is in addition to the preceding level. For example, CVA III requires a total of 2,500 hours of work experience.*

Cumulative Hours Work experience will be cumulative when acquired working at the same practice or in multiple practice (assuming sufficient documentation is available). This will allow an applicant who has completed the appropriate hours to receive a waiver of the designated time period between levels. Thus, if someone has already accumulated enough hours to meet the total required to move onto the next level, they do not need to wait the prescribed time period listed for that level.

4.0 Examination Standards

4.1 Composition and Weighting of the Examination

The CVA examination for each certificate level will consist of 100 multiple choice questions appropriate to the level of certification covered. This online exam pulls 100 questions from a larger bank of test questions creating a unique test each time it is taken.

4.2 Examination Administration

Online Testing: Level I, II, and III certification examinations (online tests located at the end of the Patterson Veterinary Academy online curriculum – www.pattersonvetacademy.com) may be taken at the place of employment. The supervisor will be required to log in at the time of examination. Because this is NOT an open book test, the supervisor must provide some level of oversight to ensure that there is no access to outside materials during the test. Scores will be immediately reported to the student and the VVMA.

Retesting Provisions: Should an applicant for CVA certification at any level fail to pass the examination, they may retake the exam as often as they wish following the initial examination date. Patterson Veterinary Academy will charge a re-test fee to cover the cost of retaking the test. This fee is \$55 for each retest at CVA Levels I, II, and III.

5.0 Renewal of Certification and CE Requirements

5.1 Renewal Dates and Fees:

Certification is valid for two years and will expire on March 1st after each two-year period has passed, with the date of initial certification at least two years shall have passed before renewal is required. For example, a CVA who passed their exam in June of 2024 will not have to renew until March 1 of 2027. The date of certification will be clearly shown on the certificate issued to the successful candidate and on each subsequent certificate issued for re-certification. Candidates are required to acquire five (5) hours of continuing education (CE) each renewal period. These CE hours may be acquired through any legitimate veterinary educational venue, including but not limited to: state and local VMA meetings, online courses, professional seminars presented by veterinary companies which are RACE approved, etc. Hours accumulated beyond the five required hours cannot be carried over to the next renewal period.

The CVA is responsible for contacting VVMA on or before their renewal date and for submitting the application for renewal of certification. The CVA renewal fee is \$30.00 and the candidate for renewal must provide payment to VVMA with their renewal application.

5.2 Continuing Education Requirement:

During the period preceding the date of renewal, the CVA must complete a minimum of five (5) hours of continuing education instruction which may be in person or on-line. Any educational content produced and provided by a recognized provider and intended for veterinary staff training may be used to satisfy the CE requirement.

Proof of Participation Documentation validating each continuing education activity must be kept on file by the Certified Veterinary Assistant™. These records may be audited at random. When VVMA requests copies of CE documentation the veterinary assistant must provide copies of all documentation for review by VVMA. Failure to provide sufficient documentation of required CE will be cause for the applicant's certificate to be deactivated to probationary status.

The applicant for certificate renewal will have six (6) months to correct the CE deficit and thus remove the probationary status. Failure to complete all CE requirements within the 6-month probationary period will deactivate the certificate completely and the individual will lose the right to use the CVA designation and all other privileges pertaining to certification. To regain certificate status, the lapsed individual must re-test for certification.

5.3 Amendments

These guidelines may be amended from time to time by VVMA. If so, an updated version will be provided to all CVAs with their renewal.