

Animal Health Care Tasks for RVTs

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The California Veterinary Medicine Practice Act defines the roles of veterinarians, registered veterinary technicians (RVTs), and veterinary assistants in providing veterinary care to animal patients in an animal hospital setting and gives the California Veterinary Medical Board (VMB) the authority to adopt regulations which establish the tasks that each may perform.

RVT Tasks

The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2036 defines what are commonly termed “RVT-only” tasks. These are tasks that, in addition to veterinarians, only RVTs may perform. The section states that RVTs may not perform surgery, diagnose, or prescribe. It then states that under direct veterinary supervision, RVTs may

perform the following tasks:

1. Induce anesthesia
2. Apply casts and splints
3. Perform dental extractions
4. Suture cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, gingiva, and oral mucous membranes
5. Create a relief hole in the skin to facilitate placement of an intravascular catheter

“Direct supervision” is defined in Section 2034(e) and requires the supervising veterinarian to have examined the animal at such time as good veterinary medical practice requires for whichever task is being performed, to be physically present at the location where the RVT is carrying out the aforementioned task(s), and is quickly and easily available.



Section 2036 also allows RVTs to administer controlled substances to animals under the indirect supervision of the supervising veterinarian. Indirect supervision requires the same examination requirements as stated above, but does not require the supervising veterinarian to be physically present at the location where the RVT is carrying out the task(s). Rather, the supervising veterinarian has given either written or verbal instructions (“direct orders”) for the treatment of the animal patient. While an RVT may administer a controlled substance under indirect supervision, he or she may not anesthetize an animal patient without direct supervision.

An RVT may perform all other auxiliary health care tasks under the degree of supervision that the supervising veterinarian deems appropriate. The degree of supervision over an RVT must always be consistent with good standards of veterinary medical practice.

Veterinary Assistant Tasks

The California Code of Regulations, Title 16, section 2036.5 stipulates the tasks that non-RVT support staff, termed veterinary assistants, may perform. Just as in section 2036 pertaining to RVTs, this section specifically prohibits veterinary assistants from performing surgery, diagnosing, and prescribing. In addition, it prohibits veterinary assistants from performing any of the “RVT-only” tasks listed in points 1 through 5 above. Beyond these restricted tasks, veterinary assistants may perform “auxiliary animal health care tasks,” under the direct or indirect supervision of a supervising veterinarian. These tasks include the administration of controlled substances, provided that the veterinary assistant has a current and valid Veterinary Assistant Controlled Substance Permit (VACSP) issued by the VMB.

Section 2036.5 also states that the degree of supervision by a licensed veterinarian over a veterinary assistant must be greater than or equal to the degree of supervision required when an RVT performs the same task, and must also be consistent with standards of good veterinary medical practices.

Properly titling each staff member and knowing the legally permissible tasks for each will ensure patient and consumer safety and keep veterinary practices compliant with the California Veterinary Medicine Practice Act. ■

California Code of Regulations, Title 16, Section 2036

(a) Unless specifically so provided by regulation, an RVT shall not perform the following functions or any other activity which represents the practice of veterinary medicine or requires the knowledge, skill and training of a licensed veterinarian:

- (1) Surgery
- (2) Diagnosis and prognosis of animal diseases
- (3) Prescription of drugs, medicines or appliances

(b) An RVT may perform the following procedures only under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian:

- (1) Induce anesthesia
- (2) Apply casts and splints
- (3) Perform dental extractions
- (4) Suture cutaneous and subcutaneous tissues, gingiva, and oral mucous membranes
- (5) Create a relief hole in the skin to facilitate placement of an intravascular catheter

(c) An RVT may perform the following procedures under indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian:

- (1) Administer controlled substances.

(d) Subject to the provisions of subsection(s) (a), (b) and (c) of this section, an RVT may perform animal health care tasks under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian. The degree of supervision by a licensed veterinarian over a RVT shall be consistent with standards of good veterinary medical practices.

Section 2036.5

(a) Permit holders and veterinary assistants shall be prohibited from performing any of the functions or activities specified in subsections (a) (b) and (c) of Section 2036 of these regulations, except that a permit holder under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian may administer a controlled substance.

(b) Subject to the provisions of subsection (a) of this section, permit holders and veterinary assistants in an animal hospital setting may perform auxiliary animal health care tasks under the direct or indirect supervision of a licensed veterinarian or the direct supervision of an RVT. The degree of supervision by a licensed veterinarian over a permit holder or veterinary assistant shall be higher than or equal to the degree of supervision required when an RVT performs the same task and shall be consistent with standards of good veterinary medical practices.