



FACT SHEET – DIFFERENT EDUCATION PATHWAYS TO BECOMING A REGISTERED VETERINARY NURSE (RVN)

INTRODUCTION

A career in equine veterinary nursing is varied and rewarding. The qualification to become a Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) is demanding and thorough, producing highly skilled professionals that are responsible for their own actions. There are several ways to qualify as an RVN, and candidates should choose the route that best suits them as a learner, and, if applicable, the practice that employs them.

THE LEVEL 3 DIPLOMA IN VETERINARY NURSING (VOCATIONAL)

The Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing is one of the most popular pathways to becoming qualified as a RVN. This qualification is completed whilst students are employed within a training practice, takes a minimum 2 of 2 years to complete. Students go to college on either day, or block release, and spend the rest of the time in practice. The course is assessed through written examinations, assignments, multiple choice E-vole examinations and End point assessments, which incorporate a professional discussion and practical examinations – also known as Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCEs). Students are also assessed via the Nursing Progress Log (NPL) which is an electronic skills log, and is a practical assessment carried out in practice. For a practice to be able to train students to become RVNs, they must be approved by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), and given the title of Training Practice or Auxiliary Training Practice. The practice must also train a qualified veterinary surgeon or RVN to be a 'Clinical Coach'. This person will guide the student through the course and the NPL. For the last nine years, all students on the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing have completed a certain number of units studying both small animal and equine species, before they are given the opportunity to specialise in the final year. This year however, this is set to change, as the qualification is being separated back out into individual small animal and equine qualifications. For people who already hold the Veterinary Nurse qualification in small animal context, and are listed with the RCVS, a fast track/add on is possible to become an equine veterinary nurse. A placement with an approved equine training practice is required to ensure successful completion of the NPL. There are many course providers that run the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing.

ONLINE LEARNING (VOCATIONAL)

Equine veterinary nursing candidates can opt to study for the Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing online at The Open College of Equine Studies (TOCES). Candidates are usually employed in an RCVS approved Training Practice, and instead of attending college once a week, they attend three, four-day study weeks per year. The rest of the learning is done online, with notes and webinars being downloaded by the student. Assignments and exams are marked by distance learning tutors who are RVNs. Candidates are still required to

complete the NPL and undertake the final OSCE exams to qualify as a RVN. TOCES also offers equine nursing technician training for candidates that are not quite ready to undertake the Level 3 Diploma but want to learn more about working in equine veterinary practice.

DEGREE PATHWAYS (HIGHER EDUCATION)

Candidates can opt to do a degree in veterinary nursing which takes three or four years, depending on the type of course undertaken. Foundation (FdSc) or Bachelor (BSc) degrees are available, and courses often include additional subjects such as practice management or animal behaviour. Candidates are not usually employed in a veterinary practice during their time studying, however a significant proportion of practical training is carried out in an approved Training Practice alongside the academic programme. Candidates are still subject to the rigorous assessment of candidates on the Level 3 Diploma, however, they also must complete a 60-week placement at an RCVS approved Training Practice to satisfy the NPL requirements. The degree can be completed in either an equine or small animal context. There are many course providers that offer the degree in veterinary nursing.

Pathway	Time scale	Assessment methods	Job in practice required	60-week placement in practice required
Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing	Minimum of 2 years	Exams Assignments Nursing progress Log (NPL) Practical exams (OSCEs)	Yes	No
Level 3 Diploma in Veterinary Nursing - Online	2-3 years	Exams Assignments Nursing progress Log (NPL) Practical exams (OSCEs)	Yes	No
Degree in Veterinary Nursing	3-4 years	Exams Assignments Nursing progress Log (NPL) Practical exams (OSCEs)	No	Yes



WHAT HAPPENS AFTER QUALIFICATION?

Training equine veterinary nurses requires a large commitment from both the student and the practice. However, the outcome is a knowledgeable, professional member of staff who has shown commitment to the job prior to qualification. Once qualified, successful candidates enter the RCVS Register and are known as RVNs. RVNs are required to complete an average of 45 hours of continuing professional development (CPD) over a three-year period and follow the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses. If things go wrong, an RVN would undergo a disciplinary process, like that for veterinary surgeons.

HOW CAN RVNS BE OF BENEFIT IN PRACTICE?

Qualified RVNs carry out a number of functions in equine practice and are specifically trained in the following areas: • Taking radiographs • Administering medications • Inserting intravenous (IV) catheters • Administering fluid therapy • Bandaging and wound care • Caring for and supporting patients • Assisting with the monitoring of anaesthetics • Scrubbing in to assist with surgical operations • Theatre practice • Critical and emergency care • Laboratory work • Foal care • Law, ethics and legislation

All procedures carried out by a RVN are under the direction of a veterinary surgeon in line with legislation. There is a large organising role to consider too. RVNs are often responsible for running procedures in the hospital and the operating theatre. The most important role the RVN has is monitoring and assessing the inpatients. RVNs monitor patients by regularly recording clinical parameters e.g. heart rate, temperature and respiratory rate. RVNs also carry out pain scoring. Just recording parameters is not enough, qualified RVNs can identify abnormalities and instigate action to amend inconsistencies and improve patient welfare. This is where good communication skills are required, as RVNs must update the case veterinary surgeon regularly regarding the progress of their patients. As RVNs are mainly based at the practice they are always near patients which makes monitoring more efficient.

ROLE IN AMBULATORY PRACTICE

As well as working in the hospital, RVNs also have a role in ambulatory practice. RVNs will often go out on visits with vets to assist in taking radiographs. Sometimes RVNs will also go out with the vet to assist with other procedures such as ultrasound scans, electrocardiograms (ECGs), endoscopy examinations, and bandage changes. RVNs can also go out on their own to perform bandage changes, take radiographs, administer medication, and provide owner education. All these procedures would be carried out in line with Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, and under the direction of a veterinary surgeon that employs the RVN in question. Being able to go out on visits is good for RVNs, as they get a change of scenery, and are exposed to first opinion cases that they wouldn't normally see in the hospital. From a client point of view, it is good for them to meet the RVNs on the yard, as then they will know who is looking after their horse if he/she ever gets admitted into the practice for treatment. This can help to enhance the client's bond to the practice.



ROLE IN EDUCATION

RVNs are very much involved in client education through procedures such as admitting and discharging patients. Formulation of patient care plans also involves a lot of input from the client, as details of their horse's normal behaviour and eating habits are required. Both the RVN and the client learn a lot during the construction and use of the care plan, and this encourages the formation of a nurse-client bond. This helps increase public awareness of the role of the veterinary nurse in practice. RVNs are also involved in client talks and courses at the practice, as well as going out on visits. RVNs are used to help educate veterinary students that come to the practice as part of their degree course. RVNs will often oversee teaching veterinary students how to perform clinical examinations, take radiographs, administer medication, and perform bandage changes, and in doing so, are responsible for educating the veterinary surgeons of the future. RVNs can also train and teach the veterinary nursing students at the practice, guiding them through their college course, by providing practical and theoretical knowledge daily.

CONCLUSION

Training to become an RVN is hard, and requires commitment and discipline, as well as long term support from a veterinary practice. However, the result is a dedicated, highly skilled and versatile professional, that can be utilised in many roles to benefit the RVN, the veterinary nursing profession, the practice, but most of all, the patients in their care.