

Vet Techs Are Key to Pet Well-being at Animal Clinics



Niki Sauve with her dog Mya

Douglas College is now offering training to students wishing to work with animals in British Columbia.

Before the College opened this program, education in this field in BC was limited to a school in Kamloops.



“Veterinarians all through our province need the services of these technicians,” says Hazel Potsma of the Douglas College Foundation. Hazel says vets and pet suppliers are supporting bursaries for this program, in the same way the Notary Foundation of BC supports Legal Studies Diploma students at Douglas College.

The Douglas College Animal Health Technology (AHT) program is a career diploma program that prepares graduates to become valuable members of the veterinary medical profession.

This intensive 2-year diploma program addresses a regional

shortage in trained Animal Health Technologists. Students become well versed in many fields of animal health care, animal management, and laboratory procedures.

The Animal Health Technologist can be compared to a medical and surgical nurse, paramedic, medical laboratory technologist, anesthesiologist, radiology technician, dental hygienist, and medical receptionist all rolled into one.

State-of-the-art veterinary equipment is vital to AHT training because it allows instructors to use advanced veterinary techniques and technologies to offer the utmost in individual patient care and herd health.

Career opportunities abound for graduate AHTs. Currently, most positions are in small or large animal veterinary clinics and hospitals. But with the increased demand for advanced veterinary care, most referral, emergency, and specialty practices cannot function without specially trained AHTs. Other opportunities exist in

research facilities, pharmaceutical companies, private industry, academia, zoos, aquaria, wildlife parks, animal shelters, and rescue organizations.

Enrolling 30 students each September at the Douglas College David Lam Campus in Coquitlam, the curriculum includes theoretical and practical aspects of animal nursing, with emphasis on veterinary anatomy, physiology, laboratory procedures, pharmacology, immunology and veterinary diseases, anesthesiology, dentistry, radiology, animal behaviour and welfare, nutrition, genetics, and surgical assistance.

The curriculum has been developed and is taught by a combination of internal faculty members who are practising veterinarians and pharmacologists, along with world-renowned Metro Vancouver experts in veterinary medicine Dr. Loic Legendre and Dr. Judy Rochette for dentistry, and Dr. Nancy Brock for anesthesiology.

The state-of-the-art facilities include a fully functional



operating room/surgical suite with medical-grade oxygen and scavenging system; a sound-insulated hospital wing; a lead-lined radiology suite with darkroom automatic processor; the newest hematology and blood chemistry analyzer; a lecture and demonstration lab; and a surgery and dental lab with 8 anesthetic machines and 8 dental units.

The inaugural class of the Douglas College AHT Program will graduate in April 2009. Successful graduates will be eligible to write the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE) and thus qualify for registration in Canada and many parts of the USA as Registered Veterinary Technologists. AHTs also can go on to specialty training in fields such as anesthesia, dentistry, radiology, oncology, emergency and critical care medicine, surgery, laboratory animals, and clinical pathology.

The current students possess a wide variety of educational and vocational backgrounds. They run the gamut from foreign-trained veterinarians and engineers, marine biologists, experienced veterinary hospital managers, retired human nurses, and equine therapists to new secondary school graduates.

Dr. Pauline Chow, a practising veterinarian with 20 years of experience, and Dr. Diane Boyle, AHT program coordinator, have been developing this curriculum over the past 3 years. As a new program at



Dr. Chow



Dr. Boyle

Douglas College, the AHT program has an urgent need for financial support in two areas, equipment acquisition and financial aid for students, with donations made through the Douglas College Foundation.

Many supporters celebrate the love and loyalty of a beloved pet or acknowledge the exceptional care provided by their veterinarian or AHT by making a contribution to the AHT Pet Trust Fund. Funds already donated are being used to purchase the high-tech equipment needed to deliver the AHT program, and ultimately improve the health and quality of life of companion animals. ▲

Voice: 604 777-6231
 chowp@douglas.bc.ca
 boyled@douglas.bc.ca

AHT Pet Trust Fund and Douglas College Foundation

Voice: 604 777-6176
 foundation@douglas.bc.ca

Amy Zywiecki had considered becoming a veterinarian in Grade 6. She knew she wanted a job working with people and animals, but the prospect of up to 8 years of university dampened her enthusiasm.

A volunteer at her local veterinary clinic, Amy began to work closely with registered Animal Health Technologists and came to realize these highly trained “vet techs” were often responsible for the daily care and well-being of their animal patients.

Although veterinarians are still responsible for diagnosing cases, performing surgery, and prescribing medications, AHTs are trained to work under veterinary supervision to perform duties vital to reaching diagnoses, performing surgery, and administering and providing proper medications and dosages. The 2-year local Douglas College Animal Health Technology Program fitted Amy perfectly.

Chris Smith grew up in England, never intending to work with animals. He was, however, always deeply concerned about injured and mistreated creatures, especially wildlife. He worked at an aquarium in England before moving to Canada. Chris has developed a keen interest in animal welfare in general—and wildlife rehabilitation and conservation in particular. He is involved with the BCSPCA and Wildlife Rescue Association in Metro Vancouver.

After working closely with AHTs at the treatment and rescue facilities, he realized he could help more animals if he had specialized training. Although Chris had extensive practical experience with many species, he needed the theoretical aspects of biology, physiology, clinical pathology and veterinary medicine, and surgery. He has become a knowledgeable and stimulating member of the inaugural AHT class.



Chris Smith, Dr. Pauline Chow, and Amy Zywiecki vaccinating Amy's Bernese Mountain Dog-cross Angus, always a class favourite