

Thank you so much for having me here to speak with you today! I have been part of Veterinary medicine in one way or another for the past ten years and I have a huge amount of admiration and respect for Veterinary Technologists. You guys are the heart of every clinic, you keep everything running, you care for the patients, you have learned how to read the veterinarians' minds, and you are vastly underappreciated.

I am here today to talk to you about help that you can find within your own clinic to make your lives easier and less stressful. A person to help take some of that extra stress off of your shoulders and thereby enabling you to do your jobs better. This leads to better client service, more profitability for your clinic, and most importantly, better care for our animal friends. After all, caring for animals is the reason we all got into veterinary medicine in the first place.

Let me start by introducing myself. My name is Candace Peace and I am a Veterinary Office Assistant. I worked as a VOA in practice for few years before being promoting to office manager and eventually to practice manager. I loved my time in practice, and I am still appreciative of everything I learned during that time. After being in practice for seven years (with a couple breaks to have children), I decided to leave private practice and it was at this time that I was offered a teaching position at McKay Career Training. I have spent the past 3 ½ years teaching the Veterinary Office Assistant program at McKay Career Training and once again, I have enjoyed the challenges and rewards of being an instructor. It is the relationship between Veterinary Office Assistants and Veterinary Technologists that I am here to talk to you about today.

It is throughout my years in practice and again as an instructor that I have found time and time again how important the relationships between technologists and VOAs are. How the staff functions together and every single person's ability to excel in his or her chosen area can make or break a clinic. I truly believe it is that important.

Let's start with veterinarians. What do you think the role of a veterinarian is in a practice? In reality, the veterinarian should only do five things in practice!! Veterinarians should:

1. Diagnose
2. Perform a hands on physical exam
3. Interpret blood and laboratory results
4. Write in medical files
5. Perform surgery

This is a guide used by Veterinary Consulting International which is run by Dr. Tom Catanzaro. It isn't always perfect and it isn't always possible. However, it should be used whenever possible and too often veterinarians are trying to do too much. This can leave them feeling overworked, frustrated, and it can often be frustrating for the staff that works with them.

And which group of people work most closely with the veterinarians....technologists! Let's talk about the job responsibilities of a veterinary technologist. What are some of them? I know what you are thinking – everything!! And in some cases, I think you are correct! Think of everything that you do in a day. You admit patients, weigh animals, prep animals for surgery, perform that surgery in some cases, wash surgical instruments, prepare surgical packs, perform laboratory analysis, speak with and educate clients, and calm the frayed nerves of those same clients. Everyone in veterinary medicine would agree that no clinic can function without the hard work and dedication of veterinary technologists. But, with everything that you do in a day, is there anything that you could turn over to anyone else? Is there an educated person whose presence could not only help your day to go more smoothly, but also to increase the quality of care that your patients and clients receive? Instead of having you run around doing everything, you could count on another trained individual to work as a team member with you. Now this is not a new idea, I think it is widely accepted that veterinarians require more team members to help them out. The problem is that for a very long time, that just meant that people off of the street

were hired to help out technicians. This is ok some of the time and if you are lucky enough to find the right person, then the clinic will flourish and you will get the help that you so sorely need!

However, more often than not, this creates more problems for you than it solves. Too often the people hired off of the street to aid the clients and you are undereducated to answer all of the questions and to care for all of the emotions that clients have. These people often want to do their best, but the high stress situations combined with the low pay scale causes a lot of overturn and as a result more work for you than help.

I remember when I was in practice, we tried to hire VOAs when possible and they tended to do a lot more of the administrative work in our practice. At one point, we needed to hire someone in a receptionist position and there were no VOAs available to us at that time. So, I put an ad in the paper and was prepared to hire the best possible candidate off the street. The ad ran for one Saturday and I received 70 resumes. In the end we narrowed it down, did interviews and wound up hiring a very sweet girl. She was young, enthusiastic, she had administrative assistant schooling and we thought we could just teach her everything else she needed to know. She did alright for the first part, she was eager to learn and she seemed to understand the computer software and the pricing without too much of a problem. However, it was not too long before we found the first major problem...she was scared of dogs. She liked animals, but she was fearful of large dogs, and some cats, and any animal that made any sort of a sound. That was the first major problem. Now try to imagine this young, sweet girl dealing with a euthanasia call. Needless to say, she didn't last very long at our clinic. She just wasn't the right fit. Now, not every single girl with VOA training is going to be the right fit for your clinic, but the same could be said for anyone in a practice.

I just want to share with you today a little bit about the VOA program, what VOAs can do to help increase the profitability and efficiency of your practice. And in turn this should help to make your job more bearable. Right now, most technologists are spending too much time doing things that are not related to your education and expertise. Once again, when I was in practice, we would receive phone calls from people interested in becoming a veterinary technologist. I would then transfer the call to one of our technologists who would go over what to expect with schooling, as well as what would be done in practice. I always found it very interesting that one of the first things she would always say was that if this person was interested in becoming a veterinary technologist, then she should make sure she enjoyed cleaning. That at least 50% of her job would at one point be cleaning. I found this particular observation to be true. Now, I am not suggesting that your VOA should come into your clinic and do all the jobs that you do not like to do, including all of the cleaning, after all, these people are educated. However, they can help you do these things as well as many others. I want to stress that the people educated in this field are not trying to be technicians! They are there to help you, aid the veterinarian, and benefit the clinic, but they are not trained to be technologists, nor do they expect to be technologists. There are several different ways that a VOA can be used in a practice. In some practices, the VOA is the receptionist. Her role is to answer the telephone, schedule appointments, prepare patient files, re-file the medical files, to keep the front reception area neat and orderly. In other clinics, some VOAs are used as technical assistants. This makes the role of the VOA even more important to you. This is someone who is going to restrain animals for you, clean the treatment room area, scrub instruments, feed and walk patients, and autoclave surgical packs.

Let me tell you a little bit about the program, so that you are better able to understand what these women learn and how they can be beneficial to any clinic.

The program is seven months long and students are expected to attend school full time. The course can generally be broken into two separate categories: veterinary specific classes and administrative assistant classes. The veterinary specific classes include basic anatomy of both large and companion animals; small animal nutrition; small animal medical conditions and emergencies; small animal parasitology; small animals vaccinations and vaccine protocols; basic clinical procedures including pharmacology,

radiation, and basic surgical awareness; euthanasia; small animal restraint; medical terminology; common breeds and basic behaviours of small animals. These classes are designed to familiarize students with some of the common conditions used in veterinary medicine. So this way when a client calls wondering about vaccine protocols or what diseases we are protecting animals from by vaccinating – you are not called to answer the call. The VOA should be able to confidently and correctly field these calls. She should be able to accurately prepare estimates for clients and give clients the proper information when preparing a client who is bringing in a patient for surgery. These girls should be able to answer why preanesthetic blood work is important and she should know the difference between when it is recommended and when it is mandatory. In small animal restraint, students learn the theory behind animal restraint and then they spend two weeks visiting different local clinics and practicing restraint on small dogs, large dogs, and cats. This restraint practice is not intended to make them perfect at restraint by any means, but in a lot of cases it can help to prepare them to help you with restraint when necessary. This frees you up to be the person who inserts catheters and takes blood samples instead of the person who restrains the animal. When I was in practice, I worked with a technician every morning. Together we admitted all the patients coming in for surgery, and then we took any necessary blood samples, performed the TPR, and gave pre-med to all of the animals coming in for surgery. This allowed us to start surgeries on time which meant we were a lot less likely to run long. One of the veterinary specific classes that I am most proud of is the Nutrition class. This class is really important, especially with all of the other information available to clients on animal nutrition, it is important for the VOA (as the first person the client sees) to be able to speak to clients about the importance of proper diet. They are able to educate clients on how to properly read labels and how to understand the differences between different brands of animal food. And the basic medical terminology allows the student to understand the veterinarian and in some cases to decode what the veterinarian has said for the client. A lot of times the client may feel nervous or unsure letting you or the veterinarian know that he or she has not completely understood everything. However, the same client may feel more comfortable asking the VOA to decipher.

The administrative classes include: business communication and basic grammar; business administration; scheduling; office procedures; and medical records. These administrative classes are a very important part of what the role of a VOA is in a practice. If you have an educated person who is able to properly answer the telephone and to properly schedule appointments, you are then able to spend more time on what you excel at - patient care.

Now we all know that despite what individual job descriptions are in a clinic – we all have to work as a team. Teamwork is the difference between a good clinic and an excellent clinic. However, in order to be able to work as a team – you have to be able to trust your teammates. My hope in speaking to you today is that you will be able to see the VOA in your practice as your teammate. Someone who can help you to make your practice better and your job just a little bit easier, someone who is differently educated than you are, but someone who can still positively contribute to the practice. So while you still may need to answer the telephone or to aid the VOA in giving answers to a client over the telephone, the VOA can also be there for you, to make your job easier. She can prepare prescription labels for you while you prepare the prescription, she can pull the file and update you on an emergency that is on its way in, and because she is educated and knows about veterinary medicine and the correct questions to ask, she can let you know what type of emergency it is and what to expect. This really can make your lives a lot easier. You do not have to do everything, there is another person in the clinic to take some of the pressure off and someone who does understand how difficult your job is and she wants to help. I know when I was in practice I was in awe of all of the technicians I got to work with. I had the extreme pleasure to work with some pretty awesome people. I was blessed because these wonderful technicians took the time to look at me as an equal, someone who was just as important to the practice as they were. These technicians taught me a lot about practice and animals and as a result,

I was better at my job. This allowed our practice to run a lot more smoothly. We were able to count on each other. I also know that as much as I learned from these amazing people, they learned from me as well. They respected what I knew and my contribution to the clinic. As much as I counted on them, they counted on me as well. We really did learn to function well as a team. VOAs and veterinary technologists are backbone of every practice. If we are able to work together and to respect each other's differences and abilities, we can benefit not only the practice, but we can provide better patient care – which is why we all got into this wonderful profession in the first place. To care for those that cannot care for themselves.

Thank you.