

Introduction

chapter

1

The Veterinary Technician's Role in Pathology

For a veterinary technician, there are certain tasks not allowable by law. These tasks include making a diagnosis, determining a prognosis, prescribing medication, initiating treatment, or performing surgery. Just because a technician cannot make a diagnosis does not mean he or she is not an integral part of the diagnostic team. Understanding pathology is an important part of the veterinary technician's job, meaning it cannot be overlooked.

TECH BOX 1.1: Veterinary technicians play a role as an integral part of the diagnostic team.

Why does the veterinary technician need pathology information? This question has many answers:

- The role of client education is often a task that is the job of the technician. Veterinary technicians will advise clients on the phone

and in person on how to best care for their pets.

- It is important to understand disease to prevent the spread of pathogens from patient to patient. It is the role of technicians to make sure they are doing what they can to keep their patients in good health.
- As a technician, there is a need to understand how to appropriately care for the patient. This understanding of the disease process will facilitate patient care.
- An understanding of pathology will aid in protecting clients, co-workers, and the technician themselves from zoonotic diseases.
- A technician who knows the disease process is able to anticipate the veterinarian's needs, expediting patient care.

Technician Duties and Required Skills

Technician duties will include patient care, client education, laboratory diagnostics, assisting the veterinarian, and treatment. It is important to

note that every veterinarian/clinic/hospital will have different thoughts as to what a technician's duties will be, thus making it important that the technician understands what his or her role is.

Some of the necessary skills involved in dealing with these ill patients include

- Client education and communication skills
 - The ability to speak with owners over the phone and in person.
 - The ability to speak clearly with owners during the intake process and answer questions in terms that are correct but on a level that the client will understand.
 - The ability to update clients on how their animals are doing and progressing.
 - The ability to convey information between the veterinarian and owner.
 - The ability to explain invoices/estimates to clients so there is an understanding of why the procedure and cost are necessary for the treatment of their pet.
 - The ability to discharge a patient and give owners any information needed to continue the care of their animal.
 - The ability to train owners how to medicate or perform treatments that may be necessary once the animal is home.
- Laboratory and other diagnostic skills
 - The ability to properly collect specimens including urine, feces, blood, and tissues.
 - The ability to properly submit and package samples to reference laboratories.
 - The ability to perform a complete blood count (CBC) and other basic hematological procedures.
 - The ability to run blood chemistry machines and enzyme linked immunosorbent assays (ELISA).
 - The ability to collect cytologic specimens, set up slides, and examine slides.
 - The ability to collect samples for bacterial evaluation and set up and read culture and sensitivity tests.
- The ability to set up, perform, and develop radiographs, ensuring the safety of all persons and animals involved.
- The ability to prepare and restrain patients for other diagnostic imaging techniques including ultrasound (US), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and computed tomography (CT) scans.
- The ability to prepare the patient, set up and clean equipment, and restrain the patient for endoscopic procedures.
- The ability to prepare the patient and equipment for other specialized diagnostic procedures.
- Treatment skills
 - The ability to place intravenous catheters (ICVs) in veins including cephalic, lateral saphenous, and jugular veins.
 - The ability to prepare fluid bags and medications.
 - The ability to calculate the patient's fluid rates.
 - The ability to administer medications through routes including injection, oral, and topical.
 - The ability to isolate infectious materials and prevent further spread of contagious diseases.
 - The ability to keep the patient comfortable and in clean quarters.
 - The ability to advocate for the patient and keep his or her best interests first and foremost.
- Other skills
 - The ability to perform dosage calculations and other important veterinary calculations.
 - The ability to induce the patient for surgery, maintain and monitor anesthesia, prepare the patient for surgery, and assist the veterinarian in surgery.
 - The ability to sterilize instruments, prepare surgical packs, and maintain sterility.
 - The ability to restrain patients for examinations and procedures, ensuring the safety of the animal and all persons involved.

- The ability to lift patients on to exam tables, into and out of cages, and help patients ambulate if they are unable to.
- The ability to perform euthanasia or aid in the process.
- The ability to maintain patient records and hospital logs.
- The ability to log and track controlled substances.
- The ability to triage patients and deal with multiple animals.

There are other additional skills and duties that will be discussed with specific pathologies and highlighted by “Technician Duty” boxes.

Diagnosis

The word “diagnosis” literally means “a state of complete knowledge” and is used to label the condition the patient is suffering from. Types of diagnosis include

- A presumptive diagnosis is the identification of the likely cause of disease.
- A definitive diagnosis is the identification of the definite cause of disease; this type of diagnosis involves diagnostic testing.
- A differential diagnosis is a list of possible diseases the patient could have. Testing will aid in ruling diseases out and narrowing the list.

What is involved in a diagnosis and what is the technician’s role? Not many patients will present with signs so distinct that the veterinarian knows immediately what disease they have. Achieving a diagnosis takes work and there is a process involved. First a history will need to be taken and a physical examination performed. A problems list will be generated that will allow the veterinarian to form a differential diagnosis. Performing diagnostic testing or imaging will allow for conditions to be crossed off that list. Technicians play a crucial role in this process, and it does not stop there. Once the veterinarian initiates treatment,

the technician will provide that treatment. Client communication is necessary throughout the animal’s hospitalization, and more client education will be necessary upon the patient’s release. What this means is the veterinary technician is a critical part of the whole process.

Immunity

Immunity is the ability of the body to fight off disease and can be categorized in several different ways.

Non-specific immunity/resistance is general protection that does not initiate a response against a specific pathogen. The first line of defense is provided by mucous membranes and skin providing a physical barrier. Innate immunity, including inflammation, fever, antimicrobial proteins, and phagocytes, is the body’s second line of defense. Specific immunity/resistance is the body’s third line of defense, giving the body the ability to target and destroy specific antigens. Specific immunity involves lymphocytes that produce antibodies and memory cells.

Active immunity is formed when the body is allowed to form its own antibodies against a pathogen. Examples of active immunity include antibodies formed when the body is exposed to a disease or a vaccine. Passive immunity is produced when the body receives preformed antibodies, such as in the instance of colostrum or plasma.

Cellular immunity (cell-mediated immunity) is immunity involving the activation of T cell lymphocytes. These T cells have different functions:

- Cytotoxic T cells have the ability to attach to the antigen and attack it.
- Helper T cells enhance the activities of other immune responses.
- Suppressor T cells aid in control of the immune response.
- Memory T cells create a memory of the antigen for a quicker response with the second exposure.

Humoral immunity involves production of antibodies from B cell lymphocytes. B cells transform into plasma cells creating antibodies, which work by neutralizing the pathogen, preventing cell attachment, immobilizing bacteria, and enhancing phagocytosis. Antibodies formed are for specific antigens and initiate memory B cells that create a quicker response in future exposures.

Factors Involved in Infectious Disease

How can two animals come in contact with a disease in their environment and only one of them get sick? The answer involves factors or variables involved with each patient and circumstance. First are host factors, dealing with the patients themselves. Age, nutritional status, health status, medications, immunization status, and stress will all play a role in how well a patient's immune system will protect it. Next are environmental factors, which involve temperature, humidity, and sanitation. Lastly, agent factors involve the micro-organism. Virulence, mode of transmission, and the amount of exposure needed aid in determining how a patient's immune system will react to each pathogen.

Common Terminology Necessary for Understanding Pathology

- *Bacterial translocation*: The movement of bacteria or bacterial products across the intestinal lining to either the lymphatics or peripheral blood circulation.
- *Bacterin*: An immunization against a bacterial agent.
- *Biological vector*: An organism in whose body a micro-organism develops or multiplies prior to entering the definitive host.
- *Carrier*: A living organism that serves as host to an infection yet shows no clinical signs of the disease.
- *Clinical sign*: Objective changes an observer can see or measure in a patient.
- *Contagious infectious disease*: An infectious disease that can be passed from one animal to another.
- *Disease*: Any changes from the state of health disrupting homeostasis.
- *Endemic*: A disease that is present in the community at all times.
- *Fomite*: An inanimate object that transmits a contagious infectious disease.
- *Homeostasis*: The ability of an organism to maintain its internal environment within certain constant ranges.
- *Horizontal disease transmission*: Transmission of disease among unrelated animals; can occur through direct contact or vectors. Horizontal disease transmission occurs when an animal comes in contact with a disease in his or her environment.
- *Incubation period*: The period of time from when a pathogen enters the body until signs of disease occur.
- *Infection*: Invasion and multiplication of a micro-organism in body tissues.
- *Infectious disease*: A disease caused by a micro-organism.
- *Latent infection*: An infection where the individual does not show signs of disease, unless under stressful conditions.
- *Local disease*: A disease that affects a small area or part of the body.
- *Mechanical vector*: An organism that transmits a micro-organism by moving it from one location to another.
- *Morbidity*: A ratio of sick to well in a population; refers to how contagious a disease is.
- *Mortality*: The number of deaths among exposed or infected individuals.
- *Palliative*: Relieving clinical signs/symptoms without curing disease.
- *Pathogen*: An infectious agent or micro-organism.
- *Pathognomonic sign*: A hallmark sign or one that is unique to a particular disease.
- *Pathology*: The study of disease.

- *Prognosis*: The estimate of the likely outcome of disease.
- *Reservoir*: A carrier or alternative host that maintains an organism in the environment.
- *Resistance*: The ability to ward off disease (immune).
- *Subclinical or unapparent infection*: An infection where clinical signs cannot be observed.
- *Susceptibility*: The lack of immunity or vulnerability to disease.
- *Symptom*: Subjective changes not obvious to the observer, requiring the patient to report them.
- *Systemic disease*: A disease that affects a number of organs/tissues or body systems.
- *Vaccine*: An immunization against a viral agent.
- *Vector*: Anything that transmits a contagious infectious disease.
- *Vertical disease transmission*: Transmission of disease from parent to offspring in the period prior to birth or immediately after birth. Examples of vertical disease transmission include transplacental transmission of disease or transmission through colostrum or lactation.
- *Zoonotic disease*: An infectious disease that can be passed from animal to man.

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