

The Veterinary Technician in Ambulatory Exotic Animal Medicine



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KEYWORDS

- Ambulatory • Exotic • Technician • Anesthesia • Surgery • Emergency
- Diagnostics

KEY POINTS

- Equipment and inventory management includes delicate diagnostic equipment.
- Transport and safe disposal of pharmaceuticals, sharps, and legend medications is crucial.
- There are many diagnostic laboratory testing challenges.
- Client communication methods and remote second-hand observation are critical areas of discussion.
- Techniques require handling emergency situations during onsite visits.

INTRODUCTION

Veterinary technicians are exceptionally versatile by the very nature of their jobs. Technicians embarking on ambulatory medicine with their veterinarian face more challenges than are normally found in a clinic setting. It is challenging work, often requiring considerable research on species (restraint, handling, anesthetic recommendations, normal values, etc), strong time management skills, leadership, and versatility when presented with unforeseen complications and emergencies. The purpose of this article is to illuminate some of the challenges that technicians face. Veterinary technology continues to grow and expand. As it does, one area of literature will be focused on the role of veterinary technicians in the ambulatory field. At the time of this writing, however, there is little regarding technicians in exotic animal-focused ambulatory medicine written, although these authors look forward to more of it in the future.

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SCHEDULING

Scheduling ambulatory medicine appointments for exotic animals is often problematic compared with appointments at brick and mortar animal hospitals. Creating a calendar and protocol for scheduling will provide veterinary team members and clients with clear ideas of when appointments, surgeries, and follow-ups are available. One method used by this author is to review a calendar year and mark when key staff members have preplanned time off, mark the busy season(s) for your clinic, and notate any factors that will affect scheduling. This author recommends having 3 to 6 months mapped out in this manner. After 6 months, it may be difficult to reliably predict the schedule, resulting in potential mishaps including rescheduling clients. This approach is often necessary around the spring and fall when koi ponds and reproductive activity are in full swing. Department of Agriculture inspections vary by state, but are cluster scheduled by inspectors and it is useful to know when annual walk-throughs happen. Technicians should create a scheduling system with the veterinarian that includes a standardization of which day(s) of the week on-site visits can be scheduled, but also allowing for emergency examinations and follow-up appointments.

Timing

Generally, assume that an on-site visit will take twice as long as it would in the clinic for the same procedures. Travel time is factored in with external factors including traffic, rush hour, construction, and weather. A physical examination on a healthy pot-bellied pig at a home 60 miles from the clinic may take 45 minutes on-site, start to finish with sedation, examination, sample collection, and reversal. Additionally, travel time must be included. For example, a visit may take 1.5 hours of travel there, 45 minutes for the preprocedure tasks, including client discussion, and another 90 minutes back to the clinic (**Table 1**). A technician in a clinic setting may schedule a routine annual for 45 minutes in the hospital but must allow 4 hours for the same visit onsite. Ideally, scheduling of multiple visits in an area reduces time out of office and increases productivity. These “cluster appointments” are not always possible. However, with good planning, routing, and scheduling, 2 to 4 on-site visits may be the typical accommodation for a workday.

Staff Requirements

Minimally, an on-site visit will require:

- A veterinarian (preferably with a Drug Enforcement Agency [DEA] license),
- A veterinary technician (preferably proficient in laboratory procedures and anesthesia), and
- A point person at the clinic (run payments, etc).

Table 1
Comparison of appointment completion times for a pot-bellied pig examination from 60 miles away

Clinic Visit	On-Site Visit
Sedation: 15 minutes	Travel to site: 60 minutes
Physical examination: 20 minutes	Set-up and sedation: 30 minutes
Reversal and send home: 15 minutes	Physical examination: 40 minutes
Total time: 50 minutes	Reversal and pack-up: 30 minutes
	Travel to clinic: 60 minutes
	Total time: 3 hours 40 minutes

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