



Trends in Compensation & Benefits



Compassion is more than just one person making another feel good inside. Compassion, at its core, means caring. In a veterinary practice, caring for team members includes caring about their compensation level, ability to establish a work-life balance, and access to additional benefits.

Compensation

The good news for veterinary team morale is that practices are paying more attention to “soft skills” when it comes to measuring success, which in turn lifts morale.

“In general, people are starting to look at soft skills and finding ways to measure communication, staff and client relations, medical record-keeping, compliance with OSHA protocols, professional appearance, [and] professional demeanor,”

said Charlotte Lacroix, DVM, JD, of Veterinary Business Advisors.¹

Practices are also raising pay: The median hourly wage for credentialed and non-credentialed veterinary technicians has increased in the last 2 years, a Veterinary Hospital Managers Association (VHMA) survey showed.^{2,3} “I talk to more and more veterinarians who wish to help their employees make a career out of working for a veterinary hospital, which is a wonderful plan,” said Leslie A. Mamalis, MBA, MSIT, CVA, of Summit Veterinary Advisors.⁴

Work-Life Balance

Balance is more important as veterinary professionals in management positions strive to have a career and a personal life, and trends suggest that while compensation has not increased for many team members other than veterinary technicians, hours worked have decreased for salaried or exempt (from overtime) professionals.

Other findings from the VHMA survey included⁵⁻⁷:

- **Managers:** Only office managers have received wage increases; however, the number of hours worked has been reduced for all 3 management categories (ie, office

managers, practice managers, hospital administrators).

- **Full-time associate veterinarians:** When medians between 2011 and 2013 were compared, the data showed that although full-time associates did not receive an annual salary increase, their hours worked were reduced.
- **Part-time associate veterinarians:** A comparison of full- and part-time associates' hourly wage revealed an increased demand for part-time associates, possibly because experienced veterinarians wanting to take time off hired part-time vs full-time associates.

Benefits

The Affordable Care Act has changed the landscape for health insurance, the most popular team member benefit. Mamalis said: "In general, my clients are looking for ways to maintain or increase benefits for doctors and staff: for example, adding retirement plans, matching contributions, offering paid holidays to full-time staffers. When health insurance is dropped, because employees can buy it on the exchange for less than the premiums on the practice policy,

employers are looking for benefits to add to make up for it."⁴

Not all team members want access to the same benefits, Mamalis noted. "One thing that is gaining traction is paying associate veterinarians a higher percentage of production but few or no benefits (other than payroll taxes); this seems to be driven by associates wanting more take-home pay."⁴

Benefits that help families (ie, pet care or childcare) are important. Although the VHMA survey demonstrated that only 2% of practices provide assistance with childcare expenses, they are still taking care of our "4-legged children." Nearly 95% provide discounts for veterinary care and products, with the median sharing 50% of these expenses.⁸

Contributing toward pet insurance is becoming more popular; 6% of practices reported contributing 65% of pet insurance costs.⁹

Conclusion

Veterinary careers are chosen because of a compassion for animals, but compassionate managers who provide fair



Benefits Example: Associate Veterinarians^{6,7}

- Full-time associates in companion animal and emergency practices received 2 weeks' vacation per year. Part-timers in companion animal practice received no paid time off.
- Mixed-animal and equine practice associates received 3 weeks' paid vacation.
- Associates earned 2 weeks' paid vacation per year during the first 5 years at a practice.
- Associates earned an additional third week of paid vacation per year after 6 years at a practice.
- A seasonal restriction was placed on 19% of associates' vacation (ie, specific times of the year could not be used for vacation).
- An allotment restriction (ie, vacation could not be taken all at one time) was placed on 50% of associates.
- Regardless of compensation type (eg, annual base salary, percent of gross billings, percent of gross billings plus base salary, base salary plus emergency fees), the bottom line is most affected by the number of hours worked.⁹



READ ALL ABOUT IT


- Compensation & Benefits, 7th ed. American Animal Hospital Association. Lakewood, CO: AAHA Press, 2012.
- Veterinary Compensation 2015: AVMA Biennial Economic Survey. American Veterinary Medical Association. 2015.



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Benefits Example: Non-DVM Team Members¹⁰

- **86%** of practices offered health insurance (median share 70% as of 2013)
- **57%** offered dental insurance (median share 50%)
- **6%** offered pet insurance (median share 65%)
- **92%** offered veterinary product discounts (median share 48%)
- **96%** offered veterinary care discounts (median share 40%).

compensation and benefits will help keep team members in veterinary medicine. 

Editor's note: *Katherine Dobbs began her career in veterinary medicine as a technician and manager, and uses her experience and human resources expertise to educate veterinary professionals through speaking, writing, teaching, and consulting. She is the founder of interFace Veterinary HR Systems, LLC, and a certified compassion fatigue educator.*

References

1. Personal Interview with Charlotte Lacroix, DVM, JD, of Veterinary Business Advisors, Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, March 2015.
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