

Deborah Tegarden, DVM Veterinarian



VETERINARIAN DEBORAH TEGARDEN, DVM

Place of Employment:
Elliot Bay Animal Hospital
Seattle, Washington

"While we often think of genetic testing in humans, vets are seeing more and more tests being developed for animal patients. This is the most exciting time I can imagine in veterinary medicine, when things are getting more and more cutting edge and technology is developing at lightning speed."

CAREERS IN THE SPOTLIGHT: VETERINARIAN

What do they do?

Veterinarians diagnose and treat animals. Some veterinarians specialize in a particular area (such as oncologists who treat cancer), and some perform research to improve animal and human health. Veterinary technicians assist veterinarians in their work.

What kind of training is involved?

Veterinarians complete a Bachelor's degree and a DVM (Doctor of Veterinary Medicine) degree, which requires four years. Veterinary technician training is usually a two year (Associate's) program.

What is a typical salary for a Veterinarian?

Veterinarians: \$45,000/year (\$22/hour), up to \$140,000/year (\$67/hour).
Veterinary Technicians: \$20,000/year (\$10/hour), up to \$45,000/year (\$22/hour).

1. Where did you grow up?

Near Portland, Oregon.

2. What do you do (i.e., what career or field are you in, what is the title of your position)?

I am a veterinarian in Seattle, Washington.

3. How did you choose your career? When did you first know this was the career you wanted?

I think I always wanted to be a veterinarian. I remember talking about it as early as my third grade essay contest, in which I described my love of animals.

4. Did your family support your decision to pursue your career?

Very much so! It was always expected that I would go to college and my parents always supported my dreams.

5. What is the highest level of education you have?

I obtained a Bachelor's degree from Portland State before joining the joint degree program in Veterinary Medicine offered through Oregon State and Washington State Universities. I now have a DVM (a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine).

6. What is the highest level of education reached by other members of your family?

I had eight half brothers and sisters, and I was the first of them to go to college. My dad went to college, however, and really valued education. I'm the youngest of my siblings.

7. What is the salary range for a person in your position?

It ranges depending upon where you are and what kind of animals you see. Most veterinarians start around \$40,000 per year [\$19/hour]; the average is about \$60,000-\$100,000 per year [\$29-\$48/hour].

8. What do you like most about your job?

I love that nearly every day, I learn something new at work. I feel like the variety of the job keeps it exciting and constantly evolving.

9. What do you like least about your job?

This job, at least at a very busy, fast-paced clinic like mine, can be extremely emotionally and physically draining. It has taught me to really value my time outside of work and create boundaries between the two so that I can fill back up!

10. What's an abbreviated day in the life of your job?

Since I've had a baby, I work three days a week instead of four. We all alternate between roles in the clinic.

If I'm seeing appointments, I arrive at 8:00 am. I see about 15-16 appointments in the morning – one every 20-30 minutes. It's fast-paced. I have to think on my feet and make quick decisions and recommendations. I really enjoy the social interaction with clients during appointments. Some days I take a lunch break of an hour, some days the appointments spill into lunch. Then I make phone calls answering client questions for about an hour. In the afternoon, I see about four to six appointments. Then I make phone calls and go home around 7-7:30 pm.

Emergency days are challenging. I come in at 7:00 am. I examine and make plans for any pets in the hospital. Then I see things that need to be seen that day. Some are huge, life-threatening emergencies and others are more urgent care appointments (i.e., ear infections, pets that are vomiting, etc.). These days are unpredictable. Usually there is very little time for a break and I usually don't leave the hospital until 9:00 pm or later.

Surgery days are fun! I find surgery very relaxing. I arrive at 7:30 am to meet with all the clients leaving their pets for surgery. Then I'm in surgery from 9:00 am to about 1:00 or 2:00 pm. I love just listening to music and not really talking in surgery. Then I usually do eat lunch and work on my charts, call clients back, and leave by 6:00 or 6:30 pm! Get to see my son!

11. In one to two sentences, how would you say you use bioinformatics in your work? If you don't use bioinformatics directly in your work, how has bioinformatics impacted your career field?

While we often think of genetic testing in humans, we are seeing more and more tests being developed for my animal patients, and much of the research is being done at my *alma mater*, the Washington State University (WSU) College of Veterinary Medicine. For example, WSU's Veterinary Cardiac Genetics Laboratory (VCGL) has developed a test for hypertrophic cardiomyopathy, the most common form of

heart disease in cats. The test for MyBPC mutations in Ragdoll and Maine Coon cats cannot prevent the disease, which often strikes without warning when cats are three or four years old, but it can prepare cat owners for what is happening to their pet.

I'm also excited about genetic testing for drug sensitivities in dogs. This has tremendous clinical use. Some breeds such as collies and their relatives, shelties, Australian shepherds, and long-haired whippets, are known to be potentially sensitive to particular drugs, and they are not used on them in the clinic because of fear of a fatal reaction. However, genetic testing for mutations in Multi-Drug Resistance 1 (*MDR1*) gene can distinguish between those dogs that are sensitive and those that are not, informing both breeding programs and treatment options for those dogs.

I think bioinformatics research will have profound effects on breeding programs, but we have to proceed with caution. There is the example of the Cavalier King Charles spaniels, who have a genetic predisposition to a deadly congenital heart condition called Mitral Valve Disease (MVD). In the 1980s, when dog breeders tried to select for animals without MVD, they did not appreciate the small Cavalier Spaniel gene pool which inadvertently led to selection for an equally deadly congenital spinal cord defect, *Syringomyelia*. As we learn more about these genetic conditions, and cross and develop new breeds with increased genetic diversity and fitness, hopefully these problems will be reduced.

12. Do you have any recommendations for students who are interested in entering your field?

Getting into college and veterinary school is becoming more and more competitive. Really focus on academics and grades while trying to still take in some extracurricular activities to present a well-rounded candidate.

13. What are your favorite hobbies?

I love being a mom. I enjoy exercise, such as running and hiking. I love cooking and eating. Being with people I love doing anything is what it's all about. I love to travel but haven't done much as of late.

Resources:

In the **field of veterinary medicine**, there are many different types of jobs available, depending upon what type of education and experience you have. For more information about different types of jobs in this field, including what you can do with different degrees (two year Associate's degree, four year Bachelor's degree, graduate, or professional degrees), visit NWABR's Student Career Center at: <http://www.nwabr.org/students/student-resource-center/career-center>.

The site also includes descriptions of and links to different types of degree programs, various career paths, resources on writing a resume and cover letter and evaluating online resources, and tips for successful job interviews.

All of the links below can also be accessed from NWABR's Student Career Center.

To learn about **job prospects, salary information, and job skills (“qualifications”)** required for veterinarians, specifically those that research ways to treat human and animal problems, visit the US Bureau of Labor Statistics: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos076.htm>.

For more information about genetic testing and research with animals, visit the Veterinary Genetics Laboratory at the University of California (UC) Davis. To see the tests available for different species, click the “Test Ordering and Information” button and then select your animal of interest. To learn more about the research being done at UC Davis using genetic techniques, click on the “Research” button and then click the name of the “Investigator” who works on your species of interest: <http://www.vgl.ucdavis.edu/>.

See Dr. Deborah Tegarden at Elliott Bay Animal Hospital: <http://elliottbayah.aahavet.org/web1/veterinarians.aspx>.

For more information about the Veterinary Cardiac Genetics Laboratory at Washington State University, visit: <http://www.cvm.ncsu.edu/vhc/csds/vcgl/index.html>.

About.com offers a Career Brief for Veterinarians: <http://careerplanning.about.com/od/occupations/p/veterinarian.htm>.

Some of the Resources above may also be used to research other careers that may be of interest to you in the future, including the Bureau of Labor and Statistics and the National Human Genome Research Institute.

Job Posting: Veterinary Genetic Research Summer Internship

The laboratory of Dr. Harriet Atman is looking for motivated individuals interested in learning about genetic risk factors for hip dysplasia in dogs. Hip dysplasia is the leading cause of painful arthritis in dogs, and is known to be a polygenic trait (involving multiple genes). Interns will work closely with lab members and help identify dogs to include in our research studies, analyze dog DNA samples, and help present research findings to other members of the veterinary genetic testing community. Prior lab experience is not necessary, but an understanding of molecular biology, including the role of DNA in encoding physical traits, is required. Applicants familiar with genetic testing and bioinformatics tools used to detect mutations are encouraged to apply. Additional computer skills, including Microsoft Office (Word®, Excel®, PowerPoint®), are preferred. Demonstrated experience of working closely with animals in the home, animal shelters, or other areas is particularly valuable. If applicants are interested in genetic research but do not enjoy working with animals, we suggest applying for an internship in the lab of Dr. Leo Frankos in the Department of Applied Genetic Research. Applicants must be hard-working, responsible, and able to work in a team environment. Address all inquiries to Dr. Harriet Atman, Seattle Research University, Veterinary Research Department, Suite 200, Seattle, WA.