Veterinary surgeon/nurse

Job description

Veterinary Surgeon
The veterinary surgeon is a healthcare professional responsible for the prevention of disease and for the medical and surgical treatment of animals including household pets, zoo animals, farm animals and horses. In addition to clinical practice, veterinarians have many opportunities to work for international organisations in biomedical research and public service.

Veterinary graduates can choose to work in mixed, small animal, farm animal or equine practice, and may obtain further specialist clinical qualifications.

Beyond clinical practice, veterinarians have an important role to play in the protection of public health, in research into diseases of animals and humans, and in other areas such as conservation and wildlife protection.

While most graduates work in clinical practice, increasing numbers are also choosing research in public service and public or private sector research. This reflects the important role of the veterinarian in animal health control and consumer protection. At present there is almost complete employment for veterinary graduates.

Many specialist graduate training opportunities such as residencies are available, allowing veterinary graduates to expand their clinical skills and achieve advanced qualification or speciality recognition. You may also choose to enter research and study for a PhD. In some cases it is possible to combine studying for advanced clinical and research qualifications.

Veterinary Nurse
Like veterinary surgery, veterinary nursing is a registered profession and can only be practiced by those holding qualifications recognised by the Veterinary Council of Ireland. In addition to working in a veterinary practice, qualified veterinary nurses can also work in a number of related fields such as commercial companies in the areas of animal nutrition, insurance and pharmaceuticals. Graduates can also choose to specialise in practice management, animal welfare, charitable work or education.

As a graduate you will also have the opportunity to pursue postgraduate studies thereby actively contributing to academic and research fields both within your profession and in related sciences.

Work activities

Veterinary Surgeon
- Handling, examining and treating companion animals and pets (including exotics)
- Discussing symptoms and treatments with owners
- Visiting farms to check the health of livestock and offering advice on issues such as breeding and nutrition
- Handling, examining and treating farm animals and species used for leisure and recreation such as horses
- Immunising animals against different types of disease such as distemper in dogs, liver fluke in livestock
- Carrying out a variety of diagnostic tests such as x-rays, blood tests
- Performing a variety of minor and major surgical procedures
- Providing out-of-hours emergency cover.

Veterinary Nurse
Working normally under the supervision of a veterinary surgeon:
- Preparing animals for surgery and assisting in surgical procedures such as a caesarean sections
- Assisting in sedation, and administering intravenous medication
- Taking X-rays and performing minor medical procedures
- Collecting samples and carrying out diagnostic tests
- Building a trusting relation with animals and their owners to ensure both are calm while the animal is being examined
- Providing appropriate care to in-patient animals including dressing and changing wounds maintaining appropriate records and providing administrative support.

(continued overleaf)
Veterinary surgeon/nurse (continued)

Work conditions
Travel: can be a regular part of the working day particularly for those working in large animal practices.
Working hours: depends on the practice but can include regular unsocial hours especially when on call.
Location: mainly in towns or cities throughout the country.
Opportunities for self-employment: very likely for veterinary surgeons; less likely for nurses though they could open boarding kennels, pet shops or animal hotels.

Salaries
Salaries vary depending on employer and/or size and type of practice (small, mixed or large animal).
Republic of Ireland: Newly qualified veterinary surgeons are paid around €35,000 a year. More senior veterinary surgeons typically earn €50,000–€60,000, although this can rise to as much as €110,000.
Northern Ireland: Average salary paid to qualified veterinary nurses is £14,000–£17,000. Those qualified to degree level can earn more.

Typical employers
Practices that specialise in small animals, food producing animals, equine work or in mixed practices dealing with both small and large animals.
Other opportunities in commerce and industry such as in pharmaceutical companies and veterinary product businesses, in international and overseas organisations and consultancies and welfare facilities such as the RSPCA and PDSA.
The veterinary surgeon and nurse's broad scientific training is also of value in areas such as wildlife and environmental conservation.

Career development
Veterinary surgeons can progress from being an assistant in a practice to being a partner. They can specialise in particular branches of medicine, eg equine. They also develop their careers in research, teaching and academic work in universities, research institutes and pharmaceutical companies.

Entry requirements and training
Veterinary Surgeon
The only undergraduate course in veterinary medicine in Ireland is a degree offered by University College Dublin (UCD). The course takes five years and in excess of 500 CAO points are typically required.

A four-year graduate-entry programme is available to those who have achieved a 2.2 honours degree in biological, biomedical or animal sciences or a Masters or PhD in a relevant area of biological science.

Veterinary Nurse
Courses in veterinary nursing are offered at the following colleges including some at Honours degree level. Not all are currently recognised by the Veterinary Council of Ireland for registration purposes:
- Athlone Institute of Technology
- Dundalk Institute of Technology
- Letterkenny Institute of Technology
- St John’s College, Cork
- University College Dublin

(continued overleaf)
Veterinary surgeon/nurse (continued)

Specific degree subjects required
Veterinary medicine

Other relevant degree subjects
Biological, biomedical or animal sciences

Postgraduate study

Veterinary Surgeon
A pre-entry postgraduate course not required for those holding undergraduate degrees in veterinary medicine.
Continuing veterinary education will be mandatory for registration from 1 January 2012.
Specialist postgraduate qualifications are available for veterinary surgeons to increase and update their skills throughout their career.

Veterinary Nurse
A pre-entry postgraduate course is not required.

Tips for applications

Veterinary Nurse
Evidence of interest and commitment by having gained experience of working in a veterinary practice or volunteering with organisations such as the ISPCA, working with and handling animals including livestock, is a definite advantage.

Skills and qualities

• Keen powers of observation
• Excellent interpersonal skill to deal with owners
• Friendly, personable and approachable
• patience and sensitivity to animals
• problem solving skills and the ability make decisions sometimes in emergency situations with confidence and responsibility
• good hand-to-eye coordination
• physical fitness to withstand long periods of time on your feet and to lift certain animals.

Training
Clinical rotations take place primarily in the UCD Veterinary Hospital in Belfield, which receives a wide range of pet species, farm animals and horses.

Veterinary Nurse
Training varies depending on qualification sought but normally involves the theory studied being reinforced with practical experience each week in the industry.

Don’t miss out!
How do you find out about job vacancies, careers fairs, employer events and how to get a graduate job? Graduate jobs are advertised on gradireland.com!
Register on gradireland.com to receive free job alerts by email – go to gradireland.com/register and set up your profile today.

gradireland is a free service provided in partnership with your careers service. © gradireland 2012.