

A status update on the shelter medicine board specialty

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OVERVIEW

In April 2014 Shelter Medicine Practice, under the umbrella of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (ABVP), was granted provisional approval as a recognized veterinary specialty by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA). The newly recognized specialty includes all aspects of veterinary practice important to the care and management of shelter animals, ranging from the physical and behavioral health of shelter animals to the environmental health of the facility as well as pertinent community considerations. It is believed that the creation of a formally recognized Shelter Medicine Practice specialty will increase the number of highly trained individuals available to provide communities and the animals they shelter with the exceptional veterinary care they deserve. Credentialing applications will be accepted this year (November 2014) and the first certification exam will be offered in November 2015.

HISTORY

The process of establishing shelter medicine as a recognized specialty has been the result of significant effort and a lengthy process that stretches back almost 10 years. Work began in 2005 when the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) formed a task force to explore the development of a specialty in shelter medicine. A job task analysis and standards for residency training were developed over the next few years, and in 2009 the organizing committee was officially appointed. This group worked diligently to explore the various options of existing under a parent organization such as ABVP, the American College of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, or the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine. Organizing committee members conducted surveys of veterinary curricula, shelter practitioners, and the ASV membership regarding their interest in certification. The committee's research culminated in a decision to pursue development of a shelter medicine specialty under the auspices of ABVP and a formal petition was created.

In 2012, the ABVP's Council of Regents accepted the petition and forwarded it to the American Board of Veterinary Specialties (ABVS). The ABVS follows established criteria for determining whether a proposed specialty organization fills a "recognizable need" as a distinct area of specialization within veterinary medicine as well as whether a sufficient number of qualified and interested veterinarians exist to form the new specialty. As per their protocol, the complete petition was posted online and comments were solicited regarding how recognition of shelter medicine as a specialty would fill a distinct need in veterinary medicine. The ABVS subsequently voted to recommend provisional recognition of Shelter Medicine Practice at their meeting in February 2014, with the final vote of approval by the AVMA Executive Board coming in April 2014.

Provisional recognition of shelter medicine practice allows the specialty to take all necessary steps to complete the formalization of the structure. The specialty is permitted to conduct all necessary business as specified in its constitution and bylaws, including the examination and certification of candidates and the collection of Diplomate dues. After a minimum of four but not more than ten years shelter medicine will submit a request for full recognition to the ABVS through its parent organization, ABVP.

Complete details of the process that led to approval of the specialty can be found at the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' website at <http://www.sheltervet.org/about/smoc/>.

APPLICATION AND CREDENTIALING PROCESS

Certification is challenging but rewarding, requiring a required number of years in shelter medicine practice, a commitment to high-level continuing education, completion of the credentialing process, and successfully passing the exam. It is ABVP's mission that Diplomates are "veterinarians who have demonstrated expertise in the broad range of clinical subjects relevant to their practice and display the ability to communicate medical observations and data in an organized and appropriate manner."

The first certification exam will be offered in November 2015. In order to be eligible for examination, veterinarians must submit an application to ABVP by November 1, 2014. Once ABVP has received the completed application and fee (currently \$440), the applicant has a 3 year window in which to successfully pass the credentialing procedure. A complete credentials packet must be submitted by January 15, 2015; failure to submit materials by this time will eliminate the first year of eligibility leaving applicants with only two years to submit and successfully pass credentials. Review of case reports and credentials takes several months, with notification being made on or before June 1. If the applicant's complete credentials have been accepted s/he is eligible to sit for examination in November. Applicants whose credentials are not accepted may re-apply the following year and need only resubmit those credentials that were considered unacceptable along with a reapplication fee.

Veterinarians considering certification should familiarize themselves with ABVP's applicant handbook and the shelter medicine practice certification requirements, both of which are available online through ABVP's website (<http://www.abvp.com>). The materials required to successfully pass the credentials procedure are extensive and take a significant amount of time to complete; only ~50% of first-time applicants have their credentials accepted. For this reason, veterinarians who have not completed the majority of their credentials before the application deadline are strongly advised to delay application until the following year or later.

ABVP has developed online study groups to help with credentials and examination preparation. Each group is led by current Diplomates who are knowledgeable about the certification requirements for practice category. Groups are divided by recognized veterinary specialty (e.g. shelter medicine practice has its own group) and consist of applicants, candidates, and anyone who is exploring certification. In addition, the Regent is also available to answer questions and provide assistance and feedback. Readers are referred to the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners' website for complete details regarding the application and credentialing process.

The ABVP certification examination is offered annually in conjunction with the Symposium; the first shelter medicine practice examination will be held in New Orleans, LA on November 11-12, 2015. All individuals wishing to obtain certification in shelter medicine practice must successfully complete the examination once their credentials have been accepted. This includes all members of the organizing committee as grandfathering of Diplomates is not permitted. The exam is divided into a written multiple choice specialty exam consisting of approximately 300 items as well as a written practical examination of approximately 100 items based on images. An exam blueprint, based on the validated job task analysis, and recommended reading list are available to aid in study and preparation for the exam.

Candidates whose credentials are accepted and who pass all sections of the examination are granted Diplomate status with all of the rights and responsibilities accorded to board-certified specialists.

ELIGIBILITY

The following information is intended to provide an overview of the breadth and extent of experience that are required for veterinarians interested in pursuing certification in shelter medicine practice. The reader is referred to the most current versions of the ABVP applicant handbook and Shelter Medicine Practice credential requirements for the official requirements and complete details.

Veterinarians must have graduated from an AVMA-accredited program or possess a certificate issued by the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates (ECFVG), or be legally qualified to practice veterinary medicine. All candidates will be required to submit a copy of their veterinary diploma, current curriculum vitae, synopsis of veterinary practice since graduation, self-report job experience form, documentation of relevant continuing education, and evaluation by three references. Veterinarians may be eligible through either the practitioner pathway or the resident pathway which have comparable but different requirements. Relevant experiences, continuing education, and publications must be from within 5 years of application to be considered.

Practitioners are required to submit two case reports OR 1 case report and 1 publication. Both individual animal and population level cases are acceptable, but at least one case report must focus on a population if the practitioner chooses to submit two case reports. Residents are required to submit 1 case report and 1 publication. Detailed guidelines for case reports are included in the applicant handbook and samples of successfully passed case reports are available online. The publication must be an approved, first-author manuscript in a peer reviewed biomedical journal detailing a new contribution to shelter medicine practice. This manuscript must be submitted by the applicant and is subject to approval by the ABVP Credentials Committee.

Practitioners must have completed a minimum of 5 years of clinical practice before submission of the application, with a minimum requirement of at least 6 years clinical experience before examination. At least 5 of the 6 years must be shelter medicine focused. Practitioners must attend at least one major veterinary medical meeting with a dedicated shelter medicine track and one national or regional animal sheltering professional conference during the five years prior to application. They must give at least 3 formal presentations to professional audiences and/or shelter staff. Practitioner candidates must have visited at least 15 different animal shelters in at least 2 of 5 specified regions and at least 3 different high volume spay-neuter programs. Practitioners are also required to participate in at least 9 on site targeted consultations, to design at least 5 shelter-specific protocols, and to advise on at least 9 outbreaks. Participation in the investigation of at least 2 single animal cases and at least 1 multi-animal case involving alleged criminal abuse or neglect, performance of at least 2 detailed live exams under field conditions and at least 1 forensic necropsy, and participation in physical evidence collection for at least 1 case are also required. Practitioners must complete a basic credentialing course for participation in disaster response and respond to at least 1 natural or other disaster. A "Shelter Medicine Practitioner Portfolio" and required documentation, including short reports, must be submitted for these experiences.

Residents must be enrolled in a program of at least 2 years in length (minimum 100 weeks acceptable clinical experience), approved in advance by ABVP, and should have completed at least 1 year of qualifying clinical experience before the residency. Practitioners must attend and participate in clinical rounds, journal clubs, and formal conferences, including at least one major veterinary medical meeting with a dedicated shelter medicine track and one national or regional animal sheltering professional conference during the five years prior to application. They must give at least 6 formal presentations to professional audiences and/or shelter staff. Resident candidates must have visited at least 50 different animal shelters in at least 3 of 5 specified regions and at least 5 different high volume spay-neuter programs. They must have spent the equivalent of at least 20 training weeks in shelter practice and 4 training weeks actively participating in high quality, high volume spay neuter programs. Additional training weeks are required in dermatology, ophthalmology, behavior, avian/exotics/zoological medicine, internal medicine, clinical pathology, necropsy, and community practice. Residents are also required to participate in 3 on site comprehensive consultations, at least 9 on site targeted consultations, and to design at least 5 shelter-specific protocols. Residents must respond to at least 60 telephone/email consultation requests and to advise on at least 9 outbreaks (including at least 3 site visits). Participation in the investigation of at least 2 single animal cases and at least 1 multi-animal case involving alleged criminal abuse or neglect, performance of at least 2 detailed live exams under field conditions and at least 1 forensic necropsy, and participation in physical evidence collection for at least 1 case are also required. Residents must complete a basic credentialing course for participation in disaster response and respond to at least one 1 natural or other disaster. A "Shelter Medicine resident program summary form" and required documentation, including all logs, must be submitted for these experiences along with a letter from the residency advisor indicating satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress.