As veterinary technicians, we vow to further our knowledge and competence through a commitment of lifelong learning (National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America [NAVTA] 1987). Over the past decade awareness of animal physical rehabilitation has increased, and rehabilitation has become a rapidly growing service within veterinary specialty hospitals, referral centers, and primary care practices. Every day, we hear about laser therapy and underwater treadmills, equipment that was not traditionally covered in the veterinary technician’s college curriculum. Learning more about rehabilitation enables the veterinary technician to better assist the supervising veterinarian when physical rehabilitation therapies are recommended. This article aims to answer some questions about rehabilitation.

**Where Can I Become a Certified Rehabilitation Veterinary Technician?**
The greatest asset for effective physical rehabilitation is an educated veterinary team (Sprague 2013). A rehabilitation technician is a certified, licensed or registered veterinary technician who has completed a prescribed curriculum to receive the title of CCRA (Certified Canine Rehabilitation Assistant), CCRP (Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner) or CVMRT (Certified Veterinary Massage and Rehabilitation Therapist). There are currently three certification programs in the United States that offer the respective titles.

*The Canine Rehabilitation Institute* offers the Certified Canine Rehabilitation Assistant (CCRA) program for veterinary technicians and the Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner (CCRT) program for veterinarians and physical therapists at training facilities in Florida and Colorado: [http://www.caninerehabinstitute.com/](http://www.caninerehabinstitute.com/).

*NorthEast Seminars* offers the Certified Canine Rehabilitation Practitioner (CCRP) or Certified Equine Rehabilitation Practitioner (CERP) for veterinarians, physical therapists and veterinary technicians at The University of Tennessee: [http://www.canineequinerehab.com/](http://www.canineequinerehab.com/).

*Healing Oasis* offers the Certified Veterinary Massage and Rehabilitation Therapist (CVMRT) program for licensed veterinarians; licensed or certified veterinary technicians; licensed physical therapists; licensed nurses and or licensed / certified massage therapists at their facility in Wisconsin: [http://www.healingoasis.edu/VMRT-program/](http://www.healingoasis.edu/VMRT-program/).

**What Is Involved in Becoming a CCRA, CCRP, or CVMRT?**
Formal educational courses and wet labs are involved for all the certification courses. Each school has its own set of curriculum. The cost is relatively expensive for a veterinary technician, but this certification will allow the veterinary technician to command a higher salary. You must be a LVT, CVT, RVT in order to attend. Veterinary Assistants are not accepted. The best way to investigate the programs is to visit the webpages listed below:

3. [http://healingoasis.edu/veterinary-massage-rehabilitation-therapy-program/](http://healingoasis.edu/veterinary-massage-rehabilitation-therapy-program/)

**Practice Regulations for Veterinary Technicians**
In approximately 40 states and provinces, veterinary technicians are certified, registered, or licensed. Candidates are tested for competency through an examination which may include oral, written, and practical portions. This process is regulated by a State Board of Veterinary Examiners, or the appropriate state agency. Every state is unique and maintains its own regulations with respect to the practice of veterinary medicine. Practice acts, legislated by states and provinces, often define the responsibilities of the veterinary technician. These responsibilities and duties are dependent in part on the type of employment the individual chooses. Below are links to Standards for Practice Acts provided by the North American Veterinary Technician Association and the American Association of Veterinary State Boards:

[https://www.aavsb.org/PDF/Practice%20Act%20Model_FullDocument_9-6-10.pdf](https://www.aavsb.org/PDF/Practice%20Act%20Model_FullDocument_9-6-10.pdf)
Each person needs to investigate their own State Practice Acts to see what encompasses practicing as a veterinary technician.

A rehabilitation veterinary technician should be working under the direct supervision of a credentialed rehabilitation veterinarian who directs therapy. The larger team can be made up of a credentialed physical therapist, the referring veterinarian, a veterinary specialist (surgeon, neurologist, etc.), a veterinary chiropractor, acupuncturist, hospital support staff, the owner, and other trained veterinary professionals (Levine and Adamson 2004).

**Overview of Working in the Physical Rehabilitation Field**

The duties of the rehabilitation veterinary technician include assisting their supervising therapist in evaluations and performing therapies. Therapies that the technician can provide include application of prescribed physical modalities and therapeutic exercises. Part of patient care is ensuring patient records are up-to-date and accurate. Proper documentation of treatments should be completed each day. Any member of the rehabilitation team should be able to refer back to the record and understand the needs and past treatments of each patient. Clear client communication and education is also necessary. Each client’s needs and expectations can vary depending on their time available for home exercises. The client needs guidance for home exercises and the completion (or not) of home exercises should be documented in the record. Often, printed instructions, as well as verbal and physical directions need to be displayed for the client to completely understand what each exercise entails. This is also documented in the record.

Pain plays a role in any patient’s willingness and motivation. A patient’s pain score should be assessed and documented in the medical record during each visit (American Association of Rehabilitation Veterinarians [AARV] n.d.). A detailed history should indicate the degree of pain and the disability (Davies 2014). How does the patient cope with the disability? If changes in a patient’s pain level are noted, the supervising veterinarian should be notified. It is very important for the rehabilitation veterinary technician to remain in open communication with their supervisor about anything abnormal or any changes in progress.

Much of the Certified Veterinary Rehabilitation Technician’s day is like any other LVT, RVT, or CVT. Animal patients are admitted, housed properly, and clean. Often during the day potty breaks are taken so the patient can relieve themselves. Records are pulled in order for the Therapist (veterinarian or physical therapist). Patient forms are in order; records sent from the referring veterinarian are available; and equipment is clean, orderly, and ready for use. Assisting the Therapist with their patients and listening to them is all part of the routine. So at this point, any veterinary technician could fill this position. What sets the technician apart that is certified in rehabilitation?

**Therapeutic Exercises**

Therapeutic Exercises are a daily part of the veterinary technician’s routine. The owner/ handler must be well educated on the exercise program, especially the home exercise program (HEP) (McCauley and Van Dyke 2013). Therapies are chosen that the veterinarian will carry them out. Categories of exercises include proprioception, balance, speed, endurance, focal strength, pelvic limb-specific, forelimb-specific, neurorehabilitation, and land treadmill endurance training (Coates 2013). Therapeutic exercise equipment includes physioballs, cavaletti rails, balance blocks and discs, weights, tunnels, rocker boards, wobble boards, and treadmills (McCauley and Van Dyke 2013). Patient considerations such as motivation, footing, assistive devices, and leash/harness control must be assessed prior to beginning any exercise program, and therapist/ handler body mechanics must be monitored to prevent injury (McCauley and Van Dyke 2013). Exercises are designed to address specific impairments and each is described with a goal, a technique, and a progression (McCauley and Van Dyke 2013). Details about each of these can be found in newly published textbooks such as:


Yet in order to fully understand the therapies, certification at one of the rehabilitation schools is necessary.

**Manual Techniques**

Specialized manual techniques are used extensively in evaluating and treating the patient (Coates 2013). Types of techniques the technician is trained in are (Coates 2013):
1. “Massage—Effleurage consists of long slow strokes, generally light to moderate pressure, usually parallel to the direction of the muscle fibers. Petrissage involves short, brisk strokes, moderate to deep pressure, parallel, perpendicular, or diagonally across the direction of the muscle fibers. It may include kneading, wringing, or skin rolling. Tapotement is rhythmic, brisk percussion often administered with the tips of the fingers, primarily used as a stimulating stroke to facilitate a weak muscle and Cross-friction massage involves applying moderate pressure perpendicularly across the desired tissue. Pressure is maintained in such a way that the finger does not slide across the skin, but rather takes the skin with it.”

2. Normal Range of Motion (ROM) is the full motion that a joint may be moved through. Passive Range of Motion (PROM) is the motion of a joint that is performed without muscle contraction within the available ROM, using an external force to move the joint (Millis and Levine 2014).

3. Stretching techniques are often performed in conjunction with ROM exercises to improve flexibility of the joints and extensibility of periarticular tissues, muscles, and tendons (Millis and Levine 2014).

Physical Modalities
Rehabilitation Physical Modalities are used as an adjunct to the patient’s treatment plan. Physical modalities are used as tools for pain, weak muscles, inflexibility, limited joint range of motion, and aiding in tissue healing (Verhagen 2013). The modalities mentioned are not presented in detail. For that, please see the above mentioned textbooks. Physical Modalities include (Niebaum 2013):

1. Superficial Thermal Agents—hot (thermotherapy) and cold (cryotherapy)
2. Neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES)—usually used to address muscular weakness
3. Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS)—used for pain relief
4. Therapeutic Ultrasound—a deep heating technique used for rehabilitating musculoskeletal conditions (Levine and Watson 2014).
5. Low Level Laser Therapy (LLLT)—(not surgical lasers) are used to accelerate wound healing, promote muscle regeneration, acute and chronic pain, chronic and acute edema, neurologic conditions, and postoperative care to mention a few (Millis and Saunders 2014).
6. Extracorporeal shock wave therapy (ESWT)—benefits include increased bone, tendon, and ligament healing, accelerated wound healing, antibacterial properties, and pain relief (Niebaum 2013).

Additional areas of education include topics such as aquatic therapy, canine orthotics and prosthetics, rehabilitation of the orthopedic and neurologic patient, canine sports medicine, pain management, nutrition, and geriatric patients.

Needless to say, a rehabilitation veterinary technician’s job is complex and fulfilling. There are advancements in veterinary medicine daily, and animal physical rehabilitation is on the cutting edge.

For those that are already credentialed in physical rehabilitation, under NAVTA direction and guidelines, the formation of the Academy of Physical Rehabilitation Veterinary Technicians is underway. This board certification will allow the veterinary technician to possess the credential VTS—physical rehabilitation. The Mission Statement of the Academy is, “We are credentialed rehabilitation veterinary technicians providing assistance in physical rehabilitation, encouraging veterinary technicians to further education, while improving the quality of animals’ lives.” For information about the Academy please contact the following members of the Proposed Organizing Committee:

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References


