



Spela Zidan

Spela was born and has lived all her life in Slovenia. She has worked as a veterinary nurse for 11 years, although there is no official qualification given for this in Slovenia. Spela shares her life with four Great Danes, a Sealyham terrier, six cats, two rabbits and five chinchillas.

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▣ Veterinary Clinic Lescu



Notes from a VN abroad – Slovenia

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About Veterinary Clinic Lesce

The clinic in which I work, has been open for 15 years. It employs four veterinary surgeons, four veterinary technicians and one receptionist. The vets have a particular interest in canine and feline ophthalmology and canine reproduction. The buildings are a mixture of modern and traditional.

General population and lifestyle

Slovenia is a member of the European Union with a population of approximately two million people. It has an area of 20,273 km² which is divided into communes. I live in a suburb of the capital city of Ljubljana where the majority of the population is middle class.

The average Slovenian family has two children and a pet. The most common pets are dogs and cats, followed by rabbits and other rodents, and some parrots, snakes, lizards and spiders. The keeping of fish is very common.

Language, culture and religion

The official language is Slovenian. In our schools, the first foreign language is English and the second optional foreign language is German. The majority of the population speaks at least one foreign language.

▣ The reception area



The main religion is Roman Catholic, but it does not affect your status when searching for jobs, and neither does your marital status or gender. Proper education and work experience are very high on a priority list for the prospective employer.

Advantages and disadvantages

The advantage of working here is that Slovenia is a small country, so we don't have problems with long journeys to work – the average distance to travel to work is 20 to 40 kilometres.

The disadvantage is that here there are many trained veterinary technicians, and a relatively small number of clinics. In addition, most technicians want to work in small animal clinics. This makes for strong competition for places.

Training and qualifications

In our country, we do not divide the profession into veterinary nurses and nurses' assistants – there are only veterinary technicians. To become a veterinary technician you have to complete nine years of elementary school and then four years of secondary school, followed by veterinary technician training.

It is also possible to do part-time study, which lasts one year and includes 340 hours of practical work at the clinic. Additional training is available by means of seminars or congresses in our country or abroad. We don't have specialisations. The education is general.

In the past we didn't have mentored formal teaching, but from 2012 we have had seminars. These are run by veterinary surgeons or technicians, who are employed in clinics, and have obtained a certificate that allows them to take responsibility for the education of students and new employees. ▣

▣ The author's dogs



Representative organisations

In 2010, we established the Association of Veterinary Technicians. The purpose of the association is primarily to organise further education, networking and assistance with employment. Members may be veterinary technicians or veterinary technician students in the fourth year of high school. The association also welcomes veterinary surgeons and small animal clinic receptionists.

Typical salary, benefits and working hours

In our country the average salary is €1,500 per month. The average salary of vet technicians is around that figure, but it depends on the employer and the workplace. We have a 40-hour working week, which is divided into morning and afternoon work shifts.

▣ The practice laboratory is well equipped



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Most of the clinics are open on Saturdays. There is an emergency call service for Sundays, weekends and nights. On-call duty is paid by the hour and averages from €6 - €10. In my area there are three small-animal on call regions and each clinic has two weeks' of emergency call duty.

Daily duties and responsibilities

Technician duties at the clinic include: receiving patients at the reception desk (you must take the details of the owner and the pet and, of course, the weight of the patient); in the examination room the vet will tell you what needs doing (injections, fluid therapy if necessary, preparation of medicine for home treatment); pre- and postoperative care, hospital care; taking dogs out after operations, and so on...

In our country, technicians perform all tasks, often on a rotational basis – one week you work at the front desk, for a week you work in the exam room and in surgery. At our clinic, the handover of patients is when one shift ends and another technician comes to

work (usually at 1pm). Morning technicians pass on to the afternoon technicians all important information about the patients which stay at the clinic and all the work that was done and still needs to be done.

Patient examination before surgery is performed by a veterinary surgeon and, if necessary, we perform a preliminary investigation – for instance, blood test, X-rays, ultrasound and anything else that is required. We recommend preliminary clinical and laboratory examinations for elderly patients.

After surgery, the patient is invariably dismissed from clinic to home care, usually on the same day.

In contrast to the situation in many other countries, our technicians are broadly trained to perform a wide range of practice tasks – reception, preparing patients for surgery, monitoring the patient during surgery, postoperative patient care, discharging the patient – and are not specialised in just one area of professional expertise.

Differences in working practice

Compared with the situation in the UK, our clients are still not particularly well educated or informed about the diseases of animals, especially cats. Owners usually wait a long time before going to the vet, so it's often too late for the animal.

In Slovenia, the use of pet insurance is not widespread, although annual rabies vaccination is mandatory for dogs.

Another difference with many other European countries is the fact that 'mixed' practice predominates; and each of these practices usually employs only one technician who performs all the necessary work.

Also, the veterinary educational system is a bit different from that of the UK. Until ten or so years ago, there was no

practical training for students in small animal practices, but only on large farms (cows, pigs). Now the case is a little bit better, giving students the opportunity to obtain practical training at a clinic for small animals.

In Slovenia, veterinary technicians are not agents for animal food companies and do not work for pharmaceutical companies. However, they may work at education departments in the veterinary faculties, in laboratories and in pet shops.

Current 'hot topics' and opportunities for CPD

Currently there are no 'hot topics' for us. The technicians' voices are heard, but not as much as we'd like, perhaps, because our association is still young.

☑ One of the author's cats and some of her chinchillas



Slovenia has an annual veterinary congress, which is organised by the Slovenian Veterinary Association. Here the technicians have their own lectures (topics suitable for the technicians) within the overall context of the congress. The small animal practice technicians are usually the ones who attend the congress.

At the end of October this year, the veterinary technicians association will organise its first webinar, supported by VETPET which is the exclusive importer for Hill's Science Plan pet food. The theme will be proper nutrition for dogs and cats, and at the end of the webinar there will be an exam. Everyone who participates is awarded the certificate of Veterinary Nutrition Advisor.

How is the UK veterinary nursing qualification viewed


My experience and impression of nurses qualified in the UK is very good and positive. I had the opportunity to attend the BVNA Congress in Kettering in 2007 (I was a member of that association for a few years) and twice I visited the BSAVA Congress in Birmingham – in 2008 and

2009. I also attended the European Veterinary and Critical Care Association Congress in Berlin in 2009.

Recognition of qualifications for us depends largely on each employer, but it is highly desirable if you have certified evidence of this type of experience. Consequently, the experience of working abroad can only be a plus for the veterinary technician in Slovenia.

As to the question of how the British veterinary nurses are treated in our country, this is difficult to answer, because I think the majority of people don't even know how the system is organised in the UK.

Advice for UK qualified VNs considering work in Slovenia

My advice for somebody who wants to come to us would be to be familiar with all the work a technician must do. As previously mentioned, the technician must be able to carry out a wide variety of veterinary practice work. It would be useful to refer to the Association of Veterinary Technicians of Slovenia, which would be ready to help you. 

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