

1980

Employer and Training Needs: Report 5 Laboratory Animal Technology

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Recommended Citation

Holley, Joan V., "Employer and Training Needs: Report 5 Laboratory Animal Technology" (1980). *Publications Archives, 1963-2000*. 123.

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Report Number Five


LABORATORY ANIMAL TECHNOLOGY

EMPLOYER AND TRAINING NEEDS

PREPARED FOR METROPOLITAN TECHNICAL COMMUNITY COLLEGE



Center for Applied Urban Research

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nebraska 
at omaha

LABORATORY ANIMAL TECHNOLOGY

by

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LABORATORY ANIMAL TECHNOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the employer and training needs in an area designated as laboratory animal technology.

Present Program

The 1979-80 catalog of Metropolitan Technical Community College explains the Laboratory Animal Technology program:

The Laboratory Animal Technology program is a six quarter course designed to provide essential background in animal husbandry, production, and care of animals in health and in disease. Through this program, students enroll in core courses in basic sciences at Metro during the first year and enroll in professional courses consisting of lectures, demonstrations, and supervised clinical experience in Laboratory Animal Technology at the University of Nebraska College of Medicine. With continued professional interest, graduates of this program are eligible for certification as Animal Technicians by the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science.

Study Design and Execution

Employment areas for graduates of this program are listed in the Metro Tech catalog:

..education centers (medical, dental, veterinary and other science schools), research institutions, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, animal hospitals, and veterinary clinics.

To determine the target population for the study, informal interviews were conducted. From these interviews, the local or regional science schools, hospitals, and commercial laboratories that employ animal laboratory technologists were identified. All of these potential employers were included in the study. The listings in the Omaha Metropolitan telephone book under the heading, "Veterinarians" was used as a sampling frame, and a sampling was done of the animal hospitals, veterinary clinics, and offices of veterinarians under this heading.

The survey instrument constructed for a previous employer and training needs survey was used and administered both over the telephone and during personal interviews. The findings of this study are presented here, with conclusions about the employer and training needs related to the Metro Tech program in laboratory animal technology.

Research Findings

Employers of Laboratory Technologists in the Omaha Area

Educational Centers. As employers of laboratory technologists, the Metro Tech catalog lists "education centers (medical, dental, veterinarian, and other science schools)." In the Omaha area are two medical colleges and a dental college. No veterinarian schools or other science schools were identified in the four-county area.

The University of Nebraska College of Medicine maintains an Animal Resource Facility which supplies animals for medical work. This department of the University employed 12 persons who cared for the laboratory animals. These positions are divided into three categories. One veterinarian assistant worked in the facility and earned \$12,500 per year. Two animal technologists were each paid an annual salary of \$10,500. Working for an hourly wage of \$3.26 were nine animal care assistants.

Creighton University College of Medicine had three persons designated as animal care technologists. However, the supervisor of this area of the college said that these roles required a variety of tasks to be performed in addition to animal care. The interviewee mentioned bookkeeping, truck driving, and clean-up responsibilities. The Creighton University College of Dentistry employed one person in animal care for \$4.03 per hour. While the medical colleges did not plan to hire additional animal care persons in the next few years, the Creighton College of Dentistry had plans to add another employee in this occupational area.

Research Institutions, Hospitals, and Pharmaceutical Companies. The Metro Tech catalog also lists research institutions, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies as employers of laboratory animal technologists. In the Omaha area, the only research institution identified was the Eppley Institute for Research in Cancer associated with the University of Nebraska Medical Center. During the initial informal interview phase of this research

study, the manager of Sasco Inc., the primary supplier of domesticated rats, mice, and hamsters in this area, said that the Eppley Institute was the largest local user of laboratory animals. The interviewee at the Eppley Institute stated that his title was "vivarian supervisor" and that he had 12 employees working for him. These included one animal caretaker I at \$3.25 an hour, one certified animal care I assistant at \$3.65 an hour, eight animal care II assistants whose salaries varied according to their responsibilities, and two certified laboratory animal technicians at \$4.06 an hour.

Through the informal interviews, the Veterans Hospital was determined to be the only hospital in the Omaha Area that employed laboratory animal technologists. The supervisor of the Veterans Hospital Animal Research Facility said that he had two animal technologists who worked with him. These persons were paid \$7,210 a year.

Since the Metro Tech catalog states that the graduates of the Laboratory Animal Technology program would be prepared to work in pharmaceutical companies, the listings under many different headings in the Omaha metropolitan phone book were surveyed. These included "Laboratories--Research & Development," "Laboratories-Testing," and "Drugs Mfrs." However, the only businesses that were found to use laboratory animals were two manufacturers of animal vaccines, listed under "Veterinarian Equipment & Supplies."

One of the veterinarian supply businesses employed ten persons in the occupation of animal care, with the hourly wages ranging from \$3.50 to \$5.50 an hour. The second firm had five persons working in this job category. In this company, the animal care supervisor earned from \$13,800 to \$21,400 a year. In the animal caretaker I position a person earned from \$4.65 to \$5.40 an hour, and an animal caretaker II was paid \$5.95 an hour. This manufacturer of veterinarian supplies was planning to build a research facility in Elkhorn but would not be hiring additional animal caretakers for this unit for about two and one-half years.

Animal Hospitals and Veterinary Clinics. Another area of employment recommended for graduates of the Metro Tech Laboratory Animal Technology program is in animal hospitals and veterinary clinics. However, the sampling of veterinary clinics, offices, and animal hospitals revealed

few laboratory animal technologists being employed by these professional concerns. A variety of trained persons was employed by veterinarians to assist them in the care and treatment of animals. Many veterinarians had hired medical technicians, licensed practical nurses, and veterinarian assistants. One large animal clinic had three veterinarian assistants, a medical technician, and two registered nurses. Another of the larger animal hospitals had an LPN, a medical technician, and a veterinarian assistant. Most veterinarians employing persons to assist with cleaning the cages and feeding the animals had trained these individuals.

The veterinarian assistants and medical technicians received about \$3.50 an hour, with the registered nurses being paid about \$4.00 an hour. The individuals employed to feed the animals and clean the cages usually received minimum wages.

Many of the veterinarians complained of the state requirement that veterinarian assistants be licensed. One said the Nebraska Veterinary Medicine Association did veterinarians and technicians a disservice in requiring licensing by the state, since the training required for licensing involves large animal work and is applicable primarily to rural veterinary work. Several of the veterinarians mentioned that the topic of assistants in a veterinary clinic is a sensitive subject since someone without a state license cannot be called a "veterinarian assistant."

The Need for Laboratory Animal Technologists

Animal Hospitals and Veterinary Clinics. Most of the veterinarians participating in the study did not perceive a need for trained laboratory animal technologists. One owner of a veterinary hospital said, "Metro's program may be fine, but the graduates can't be hired because the program isn't accredited by the American Veterinary Medicine Association." Another said that he has had young women apply for jobs who had veterinarian assistant certificates from programs in Kansas and Minneapolis, as well as from the College of Veterinarian Technicians of the Nebraska School of Technical Agriculture at Curtis, Nebraska. These available applicants would be better qualified for work in the clinic than graduates of the Metro Tech program, according to this interviewee. Also available are a quantity of college biology graduates who have taken additional programs

in medical technology, some of whom are certified by the American Society of Clinical Pathologists. One veterinarian advised, "I would be very cautious about graduating too many students in this area." All of the veterinarians who participated in the study indicated that the number of persons qualified for work with the animals exceeds the number of job openings.

Other Employment Areas. The supervisors of the laboratory animal sections of educational centers, hospitals, and the veterinary supply companies were equally divided on the question of whether or not a demand exists for persons trained in laboratory animal technology. One-half of these employers responded that there were more job openings than trained people available, but the other half replied that the number of trained people exceeded the number of available jobs. The manager of one of the veterinarian supply businesses said that he had tried persons with medical technician backgrounds, but they were overqualified to care for the laboratory animals used by his company. None of those interviewed in these employment areas reported that there was competition for the Metro graduates from persons who had taken education/training programs at other institutions.

Employer Recommendations for Education/training Preparation

These employers listed the following knowledges and skills as required for the jobs in their departments: sanitation and housing control, restraint of common laboratory animal species, basic care giving, disposal of animals, and surgical assistance.

Jobs were gained in laboratory animal technology at the Veterans Hospital Animal Research Facility through civil service examinations and placement. The Creighton University College of Medicine trained their own laboratory animal technologists and stated that they would not be able to utilize the services of Metro Tech graduates. The representatives of the Eppley Institute and the University of Nebraska College of Dentistry both recommended a two-year laboratory animal program as being the best preparation for work in their facilities. Also recommended by several interviewees was a three-month program in laboratory animal technology.

One animal laboratory supervisor recommended that Metro Tech "kill the program and start all over to restructure the course offerings." This

employer said, "There is an overkill in pharmacology in the present program."

A manager of one of the veterinarian supply firms said that the caretaker I position in the company did not require a high school education. However the caretaker II job would require about three years experience in a manufacturing facility, and the supervisory position would require at least five years of experience in a manufacturing facility. Also, their firm preferred applicants with certification from a program sponsored by the Ralston Purina Company. She also recommended an educational background of a one-year program that would include biology and animal husbandry. For the five laboratory animal technology jobs in the company 53 persons have been hired in the past two years. The manager of the other veterinarian supply business said:

It isn't really a matter of training or skills. This is crummy work. Cleaning out cages is messy. These jobs just take a certain kind of person.

Animal Hospital and Veterinary Clinic Employers. The veterinarians listed these qualifications for work in their offices, hospitals, and clinics: a knowledge of laboratory work, surgery, sterilization, sanitation, diseases, and medical treatment; the ability to work with people and animals, and "being a quick learner." Most of the veterinarians said that they preferred persons with a medical background whom they would train in veterinary procedures, or else certified veterinarian assistants.

Almost all of these professionals had negative comments about the Metro program. One veterinarian said, "The Metro program is terrible. The students are unprepared to do the necessary laboratory work." Another said, "The Metro program doesn't even teach them to do white counts or a urinalysis. An animal hospital owner suggested that the course of studies be a 40-hour program that would prepare students to do laboratory technician work. However, many concluded their comments by stating that jobs were not available. One said, "I have a backlog of applicants, anyway."

Conclusions

In the Omaha metropolitan area only seven organizations could be identified that utilized laboratory animals and employed laboratory animal technologists: two medical colleges, two veterinary supply companies, a dental college, a research institution, and a hospital.

One of the colleges of medicine trained their own laboratory animal technologists, and, thus, would not employ graduates of a laboratory technology program. The hospital obtained employees through the civil service examination procedure. Of the other five, only two stated that a program similar to the one at Metro Tech would be the best preparation for positions in their organizations.

The findings of the research indicated that most of the local veterinarians preferred applicants who had medical or veterinary assistant backgrounds. The local medical technology program, nursing schools, and the College of Veterinarian Technicians in Curtis, Nebraska, supply a surplus of applicants for the available jobs in animal hospitals and veterinary clinics and offices. Veterinarians also were negative in their attitudes toward the Metro Tech program since the graduates could not perform the diagnostic laboratory work required in their professional practices.