The Importance of LVTs in Biomedical Research

By Angelique Colby, LVT, RLATg, CPIA

Groundbreaking biomedical research and the resulting discoveries do not happen overnight and often require a team of dedicated individuals to bring brilliant ideas to fruition. Scientists clearly play a tremendous role, but many people do not appreciate the essential role of Licensed Veterinary Technicians (LVTs) on a research team. LVTs help ensure that animals in research are well cared for and enriched during their time on a research study. As an LVT in research, I strive to provide community outreach to educate the public and members of the veterinary field about the importance of animals in research. Without animal research, new medical discoveries would not be possible for human and veterinary medicine.

LVTs in research have the opportunity to work with a variety of species including mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits, ferrets, sheep, goats, pigs, cattle, horses, primates and others. Each of these laboratory animal species contributes to biomedical research by helping scientists answer questions and learn new information that can be translated to other animals or humans. There are laboratory animal-specific certifications available for LVTs in research who want to further specialize and hone their skills. Certifications are offered through the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), the Academy of Laboratory Animal Veterinary Technicians and Nurses (ALAVTN) and the Academy of Veterinary Surgical Technicians (AVST). Many LVTs pursue careers in laboratory animal research because of the species variety and hands-on opportunities. These LVTs support fascinating and groundbreaking research, which makes every day different and challenging. After the animal research is done, data collected and manuscript published, it is a very satisfying feeling to know that you are helping to save animal and human lives!

I have assisted many researchers in the discovery of life-saving medical devices and medications that are used every day around the world.

When I started in animal research, I was an intern veterinary technician (between my first and second year of veterinary technology school at Palo Alto College in San Antonio) at the laboratory animal department where we attended our lab animal course lab each week. From there, I worked part-time until I graduated from the veterinary technology program in 2004. After graduation, I was hired as an LVT, passed my exams to become a Registered Laboratory Animal Technologist (RLATg) and became the supervisor of the LVT staff. After a few years, I was asked to supervise the rodent animal care team along with the LVT team. In 2015, I decided to move into the regulatory office for the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), and within five years, I passed my Certified Professional in IACUC Administration (CPIA) exam, showing my dedication to and expertise in research implementation and regulatory guidance. So, there are many ways that an LVT can contribute to the biomedical research field!

Since moving into the regulatory office, I realized that very few voices are talking about the importance of veterinarians and LVTs in animal research, so I found a way to tell people about animal research and how important it is for human and animal lives.

Every year, I attend multiple public events where I share the importance of animals in research through Biomedical Research Awareness Day (BRAD), which is an international outreach program through Americans for Medical Progress (AMP) that seeks to increase public awareness about animal roles in biomedical research and the resulting medical advancements that benefit both humans and animals. BRAD highlights the importance of animal studies and demonstrates a research organization’s commitment to providing excellent animal care. It also builds a research advocate community and showcases biomedical research laboratory animal care and medicine careers. I have hosted annual BRAD events since 2018 throughout the San Antonio metro area at universities, colleges, high schools and even Fiesta events where I spend the day talking to public attendees, students, faculty and staff about the incredible animal research that takes place in our area.

Currently, I am a regional BRAD Champion and organize multiple events each year. I recently coordinated and managed BRAD events at UT Health San Antonio, Viva Science! San Antonio at the Witte Museum, career fairs at schools around San Antonio and BRAD at the Palo Alto College Veterinary Technology Program. If you are interested in hosting a BRAD event or would like someone to come talk to your veterinary team, please reach out to the BRAD team, and they can find a BRAD representative near you to attend.

Resources

National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, Veterinary Technician Specialties: https://navta.net/veterinary-technician-specialties/American Association for Laboratory Animal Science: https://www.ala.org/certificationAcademy of Laboratory Animal Veterinary Technicians and Nurses: https://www.alavtn.org/