

# Veterinarians in Aquatic Medicine

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Veterinarians have long been thought of as the leaders in animal health for dogs, cats, horses, livestock, and even birds, but only recently have veterinarians made a significant move into the health arena for fish. Veterinarians are now becoming some of the most respected leaders in the aquarium and aquaculture industry. When you look at the training of veterinarians, it is easy to see why they are well-suited for being a very good source of expertise for aquarium hobbyists.

## Pre-Veterinary Education

Most veterinarians enter veterinary school with a bachelor's degree in biology, chemistry, or animal health related fields. Before they can even enter veterinary school they have to have successfully completed courses in biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, physics, genetics, anatomy, zoology, and a host of other science and animal husbandry classes. To gain an expertise level of understanding of aquatics you need to have a good grasp on all of these topics.

## Professional Veterinary Education

After entering veterinary school veterinary students take four more years of science courses including physiology, virology, immunology, pharmacology, pathology, and advanced biology. These are not species specific courses. In fact, the first two years of veterinary school are general courses that go into incredible detail about the physiology and health of all living organisms. It is only in the end of the third year of veterinary school that veterinarians begin to develop a species specialty, but even then, many of the courses are directed at advanced health topics in all species. Ultimately, veterinary students can then choose to specialize in one or two species or, they may choose to be general practitioners and treat all species.

Upon graduation, veterinarians take an oath, which in part states: "I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge." This oath includes being leaders in the humane and competent health care of every animal, including fish.

## Choosing the Aquatic Veterinary Profession

It is not because of lack of training that most veterinarians do not become aquatic veterinarians. In fact, the huge amount of scientific training that veterinarians receive makes them more qualified to become experts on aquatic health than any other profession. Over the past 15 years there has been an increased interest in the aquarium hobby with a result of more aquatic veterinarians graduating every year. While it is harder to find a veterinarian that specializes in aquatics than it is to find one that treats dogs and cats, they are out there and their numbers are increasing. There is even an Association of Aquatic Veterinarians.

Aquarium keeping has seen huge technological advances making it one of the fastest growing hobbies in the country. Today's aquarists have setups that are too sophisticated and delicate to rely on advice which is based on trial and error or that "everyone else does it that way." So seek out an aquatic veterinarian to assist you in solving health or environmental problems and you can be sure that you are getting the most up to date information based on 8 years of specific scientific training and health experience.