

CAREER PATH

Is there a vet in the house?

The primary task of veterinarians is to diagnose, treat and prevent illnesses in pets, livestock, marine animals and wildlife. Students forging careers in this field can expect fulfilling moments in their lives, reports **KOH SOO LING**.

IF you love animals and feel a genuine commitment to their well-being, then veterinary science is worth pursuing. Aspiring veterinarians must possess a high academic ability, an aptitude and interest in biological sciences, an inquiring mind, keen powers of observation and good communication skills.

Veterinarians diagnose, treat and prevent illnesses in pets, livestock, marine animals and wildlife.

Being a veterinarian involves applying scientific knowledge and then deciding on suitable action to improve the health, welfare and productivity of animals.

Veterinarians manage outbreaks of animal diseases, maintain Malaysia's quarantine status, ensure the quality of animal product exports and conduct research. They also look into animal (or pet) management, animal welfare, conservation and breeding of endangered species and the rehabilitation of orphaned and injured wildlife.

The veterinary science programme offered by Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) is the only one in the country and to get a place at a recognised veterinary school overseas is extremely difficult.

The programme at UPM requires clinical and technical skills to diagnose, treat, prevent and investigate animal diseases.

It has two major aspects:

- animal science, which equips graduates with the necessary knowledge in various livestock industries; and

- veterinary medicine, which covers animal diseases and disease control.

Currently, Malaysia has about 800 veterinarians and more are needed by the animal industry in various capacities.

UPM's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine dean Professor Dr Mohd Zamri Saad says veterinary graduates are employed by various government agencies, particularly the Department of Veterinary

Services. They help to formulate policies of the animal industry, prevent animal disease outbreaks and monitor veterinary practices.

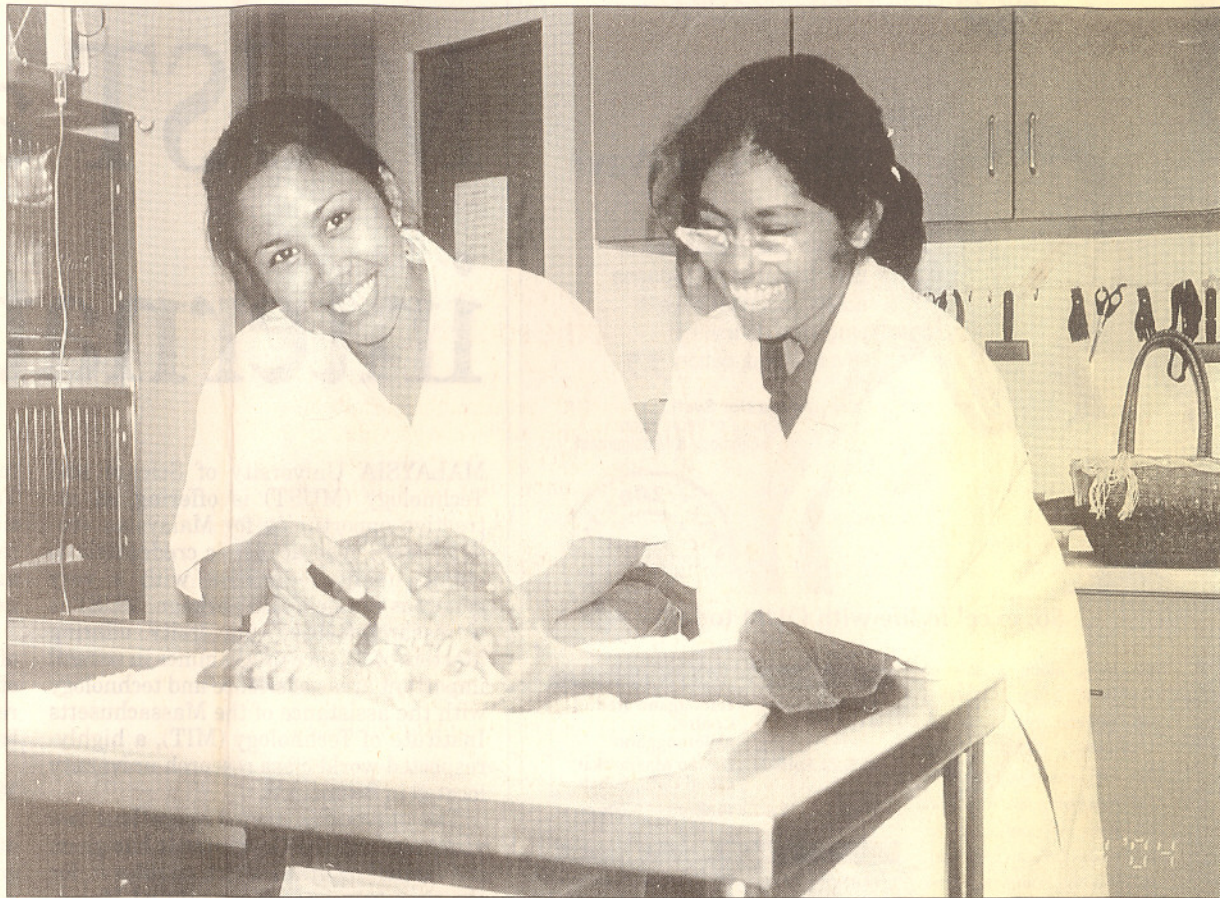
Graduates can also find employment in agencies such as the Federal Land Development Authority (Felda) and the Palm Oil Research Institute of Malaysia (Porim).

Private companies dealing with animals also require the services of veterinary graduates, particularly those in the poultry, swine, pharmaceutical and animal feed sectors.

They are usually involved in flock health monitoring and disease prevention.

Veterinarians are members of a legally defined and protected profession. They are also qualified to teach and be involved in research activities related to the biological sciences.

Lately, some local graduates have turned to private practice. They operate pet animal clinics, giving



HANDS-ON APPROACH: Volunteers at a pet clinic in Selangor. A love for animals is important for those keen on a satisfying career in this field.

veterinary medical services to clients who are concerned about the health of their pets.

"I would advise school-leavers to venture into this line only if they are very interested in animals," says Dr Vijayndra Madawan from Healing Rooms, a veterinary clinic in Subang Parade, Subang Jaya, Selangor.

"It is not a glamorous or fashionable job. It is best that they volunteer themselves first at private or public clinics to get a taste of what it feels like to work with animals," he adds.

Says Dr Mohd Zamri: "Since the veterinary programme is a professional and practical one, getting hands-on training and

practical exposure may be one problem, particularly when the number of students exceeds the 60-student capacity.

For veterinarians, their main worry will be controlling disease outbreaks.

Dr Vijayndra adds: "Sometimes, accidents happen when sick animals are handled. But the real challenge is dealing with pet owners who can be very emotional when their pets have a slim chance of survival.

"Once I operated on a pet iguana. It was a very enriching experience."

In the event of disease outbreaks such as the bird flu, veterinarians play a vital role.

In such situations, the coordinated

effort of all veterinarians in Malaysia — whether they are in the Department of Veterinary Services or in private practice — is the key to success.

For more information, log on to www.vet.upm.edu.my/english/undergrad.html

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■ NEXT WEEK: Engineering