

THE NAVIGATOR



WEALTH PLANNING FOR VETERINARIANS – PART 1: THE EARLY YEARS

Whether you are a new graduate, working to gain experience, running your own practice or approaching retirement, tax, financial and retirement planning will always play a key part at every stage of your career. As your personal, professional and financial situations evolve, you should ensure that you've done appropriate planning to help you achieve your goals and objectives throughout the different stages of your professional life.

The content in this article is for information purposes only and does not constitute tax or legal advice. It is imperative that you obtain professional advice from qualified tax and legal advisors before acting on any of the information in this article. This will ensure that your own circumstances are properly considered and that action is taken based on the most current legislation.

This four-part series takes you through some of the key planning issues you should consider at various stages of your professional career.

Part 1: The Early Years

Part 2: Starting Out on Your Own

Part 3: The Peak Earning Years

Part 4: Preparing for Retirement

The first in a four-part series, this article addresses the relevant issues you may face when first starting out in the veterinary field.

CHOOSING A PRACTICE ARRANGEMENT THAT IS RIGHT FOR YOU

As a new graduate entering the profession, there are several ways to practice veterinary medicine and there are different settings in which you can practice. The majority of veterinarians

work in veterinary services through their own private, owner-operated small business or as an employee of a private clinic while the remainder work in public administration and universities. Given the large amount of student debt following graduation, the risks associated with starting your own practice from scratch, and the capital required to purchase an existing practice, most new graduates work as employees or independent contractors in animal care

establishments before starting their own practices.

EMPLOYEE VS. INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR

Depending on the work arrangement mutually agreed upon by a veterinarian and the practice owner, the veterinarian could be an employee or an independent contractor. The arrangement should be formally specified in a contract.



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Some veterinarians are considered an employee or salaried individual and are paid by their employer as per the terms of their employment contract. Others working in private practice, however, are considered independent contractors or self-employed individuals. They engage in a fee-for-service arrangement and they generally receive a certain percentage of the billings or collections.

The question of whether a veterinarian is in a business relationship (i.e. self-employed or independent contractor) or in an employee-employer relationship with the practice or institution is important from both a legal and tax perspective. From a legal perspective,

the classification of being an employee or independent contractor determines which laws govern and protect the veterinarian's relationship with the business. For example, employees are protected by common law or the Civil Code of Quebec and provincial employment legislation with respect to termination while independent contractors generally do not enjoy such protection. From a tax perspective, employees will have income taxes, Canada Pension Plan (CPP)/Quebec Pension Plan (QPP) contributions and Employment Insurance (EI) premiums deducted by their employer from their pay cheque and remitted to the government on their behalf. Independent

contractors do not have statutory deductions withheld from their billings; rather, independent contractors are generally required to remit quarterly tax instalments to the government as well as pay certain expenses out of pocket that would normally be covered by an employer. On the other hand, while employees have little ability to claim any deductions against their employment income, independent contractors may be able to claim business expenses incurred as deductions on their income tax returns, provided the expenses are reasonable and were incurred for the purpose of earning income.

Summary of Advantages and Disadvantages of Being an Employee vs. Independent Contractor

| | ADVANTAGE | DISADVANTAGE |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Employee | Fixed negotiated salary. | Limited ability to earn more money (i.e., bonuses). |
| | Qualifies for EI. | Must pay for EI premiums. |
| | 50% of CPP/QPP premiums paid by employer. | Very few expenses are tax-deductible. |
| | Participation in employee benefits (i.e., paid vacation time, extended health benefits, pension plans). | Less control over hours of work and working conditions. |
| | Severance pay if terminated. | May be restricted to working for one employer. |
| Independent Contractor | Income is determined by volume of procedures and services performed. | No fixed or minimum income. |
| | Optional EI premiums. | No severance pay generally if contract is terminated. |
| | May be able to deduct business-related expenses. | Must pay employee and employer portions of CPP/QPP and EI (if opting for EI coverage). |
| | More freedom to choose own working hours and can work for more than one client. | No employee benefits. |

The specific provisions in a contract will act as a guide in determining the nature of the relationship; however, the essence of the relationship determines whether an individual is an employee or an independent contractor, regardless of what is written in the contract. There have been many court cases that have addressed the question of whether someone is an employee or independent contractor. The courts generally look at the following factors to determine whether the professional is acting as an employee or an independent contractor:

Factors in Determining Employee or Independent Contractor Status

| FACTORS | EMPLOYEE | INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR |
|--|--|---|
| Degree of control and supervision | High degree of supervision and control by the employer over professional's activities. | Low degree of supervision and control by employer over professional's activities. |
| Equipment and helpers | Little to no monetary investment in the practice. The employer provides equipment and helpers. | High level of monetary investment in practice. The professional provides his/her own equipment and helpers. |
| Chance of profit and risk of loss | The professional does not participate in the practice's profits and has little financial risk. | The professional has opportunity to profit and has a degree of financial risk. |
| Integration | The professional receives the economic rights, privileges and benefits normally enjoyed by employees. The professional's income is mainly derived from a single employer and his/her work is an essential component of the business. | The professional works for more than one client (or has the ability to have more than one client). The professional's work is not integral to the business but is an accessory to the business. |
| Intention of parties | The parties' intentions and the existence of a written contract indicate that there is an employer-employee relationship assuming the actual circumstances point towards a legitimate employment relationship. | The parties' intentions and the existence of a written contract indicate that the professional is working as an independent contractor assuming that the actual circumstances point to a legitimate contractual relationship. |

This is not an exhaustive list of factors and there is no set formula in their application. The relative weight of each factor will depend on the particular facts and circumstances of the case. It is recommended that you review your agreement with a qualified legal professional to ensure that it truly reflects an employee or independent contractor relationship with the practice or institution with which you are working. You can also request a ruling from the Canada Revenue Agency to provide you with certainty about the status of the relationship into which you have entered. To request a ruling, use Form CPT1, Request for a Ruling as the Status of a Worker under the Canada Pension Plan and/or the Employment Insurance Act, available at <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/E/pbg/tf/cpt1/README.html>. For Quebec residents, a ruling can be obtained from Revenu Québec for purposes of the QPP and the parental insurance by completing Form RR-65-V, Application for Determination of Status as an Employee or a Self-Employed Person, available at

<http://www.revenuquebec.ca/en/sep/f/formulaires/rr/rr-65.aspx>.

It is advisable that you determine whether you are an employee or self-employed contractor prior to the start of your work contract.

MANAGING YOUR FINANCES STUDENT DEBT

Only interest payments on loans negotiated and still existing with either the Canada Student Loans Program or a Provincial/Territorial Loans Program are eligible for a non-refundable tax credit. Interest paid for any other indebtedness, such as bank loans or lines of credit (LOCs), will not be eligible for this credit and is not tax deductible. As such, the number one priority for most newly licensed veterinarians with bank loans or LOC is to pay off their student debt. This makes good economic sense as interest on personal non-deductible debt can be very costly.

Consider refinancing your debt if your current LOC is not offering you

competitive rates. Some LOCs that are tailored towards professionals will allow you to defer the payment of the principal of the loan until 12 months after completion of your residency/internship. These LOCs are typically offered at a rate reserved for some of the institution's best clients meaning you would be receiving the best rate possible.

CASHFLOW MANAGEMENT

A budget is a plan to help you keep track of your income and expenses to give you a clear picture of where your money is coming from and where your money is being spent. The goal of a budget is to make sure that you don't spend more than you earn. This way you can pay off your debt faster or avoid increasing your debt load and maybe even start saving or creating an emergency fund.

ASSET ALLOCATION

If, after all your expenses, you have money left over, you may be wondering what to do with the savings. What you invest in depends on your personal financial goals and objectives. Are you

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saving for a wedding, a car, a home, or retirement? Do you want to grow your money for the future? Do you want to save to open your own practice in the near future?

Your RBC advisor can provide you with tailored financial solutions to help meet most of your needs as you are starting out.

FINANCIAL AND DISABILITY PLANNING

While you are in the process of establishing your career in the veterinary medicine profession, you also need to protect yourself in the face of unexpected events, such as disability or job interruption. It is recommended that you have at least three months worth of income in an accessible form in case of emergencies. A Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) may be a good place to invest your emergency fund as the income generated in the TFSA is earned tax-free and withdrawals made from a TFSA are not taxable.

You should also have adequate insurance to meet your needs. Disability insurance is one form of insurance which will provide a portion of your regular income in the event you become disabled. Disability insurance premiums are not tax deductible. However, disability payments are also not taxable when they are paid to you. Critical illness insurance is another form of insurance that you may wish to consider purchasing when planning for unexpected events. This type of insurance provides a lump sum payment in the

event that you are faced with certain listed types of illnesses, such as cancer, stroke or a heart attack. Disability and critical illness insurance may be provided by your employer as part of a benefit plan. You should ensure that the amount of coverage provided is sufficient for your particular situation. If the amount is insufficient, or if you are an independent contractor, you will have to obtain coverage personally.

Whether or not you have someone financially dependent on you will determine the level of life insurance coverage you need. Ask yourself the following question: "Am I confident that if I die or become disabled, my family or I have adequate assets and income to maintain our standard of living?" If the answer is "No" or "I don't know," then speak to your insurance advisor about getting a personal insurance analysis to determine if you are underinsured, and if so, by how much. Give yourself and your family the peace of mind by taking immediate action today to secure your family's financial future in the event of an unforeseen occurrence.

ESTATE PLANNING

Estate planning involves the transfer of your assets when you die, as well as a variety of other personal matters. It is important to keep in mind your family's needs as part of your estate plan. A Will and Powers of Attorney (POAs) for property and for personal care are the most common

tools used in estate planning.

A Will is a legal document that can help ensure that your assets pass according to your wishes after your death. Your Will only becomes effective on death, and if probated, becomes a public document. During your lifetime, you can change the terms or revoke your Will as long as you are mentally competent.

A POA is a legal document in which you give another person(s), referred to as the attorney(s), the power and authority to act on your behalf. A POA is most important in case you should become incapacitated and cannot perform for yourself your normal daily tasks, such as paying bills and managing your investments. A POA for property allows an attorney(s) to make decisions about your financial and property matters. A different legal document may be used in some provinces and territories to make personal care decisions. In some provinces, you can execute one document which will contain your authority for an attorney to act on your behalf in relation to financial and property matters as well as personal care matters.

Give your family and yourself peace of mind by booking an appointment with a legal advisor who specializes in Will and estate planning to get a thorough and up-to-date Will and POAs. This can help to avoid unnecessary stress and expense at what can be a difficult time and ensure that your wishes are carried out.

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