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**Local Students Scrub in as Veterinarians for a Day, Gaining Hands-On Experience and Immersive Training at the World's Largest Veterinary Conference**

*At Third Annual VMX/blendVET Event, Students Learn to Suture, Draw Blood, Conduct CPR and More*

**ORLANDO, FL – Dec. 17, 2024 –** For the third consecutive year, the [North American Veterinary Community \(NAVC\)](#) and [blendVET](#) are teaming up to host a full day of hands-on learning. Seventy local middle school students from Central Florida will participate in *Believe & Belong in Veterinary Medicine*, a national education program created for students in underrepresented communities. This event will take place at the [42nd annual Veterinary Meeting & Expo \(VMX 2025\)](#) at the **Hyatt Regency Orlando in Orlando, FL, on Tuesday, Jan. 28 from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.**

*Believe & Belong in Veterinary Medicine*, the blendVET pathway event, was created to open the doors to a career in veterinary medicine for underrepresented students and address the lack of diversity in veterinary medicine. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 90% of veterinarians are white, with as few as 1.3% Black, 5.9% Asian and 5% considered to be Latin X.

Alongside nationally recognized veterinarians and veterinary nurses/technicians, students will participate in immersive training, conduct physical exams, learn to draw blood on models, perform CPR on veterinary models, and gown up in surgical attire to learn surgical techniques. This year, for the first time, returning students will dive into specialized areas of veterinary medicine including ophthalmology to explore animal eye care and large animal medicine, where they will learn how to approach and examine horses. The event will help them prepare for varying pathways as they navigate a career in veterinary medicine.

"I am thrilled to announce our continued collaboration with NAVC for the third consecutive year hosting the *Believe & Belong in Veterinary Medicine* program at VMX," said Niccole Bruno, DVM and blendVET founder and CEO. "This year, we are proud to expand our offerings, providing tailored experiences for both new participants and returning blendVET students. It's particularly rewarding to see some of our scholars who have been with us throughout all four of our Florida events excitedly return to deepen their knowledge of the profession and strengthen their skills."



At the VMX 2024's *Believe & Belong in Veterinary Medicine* event, students practiced suturing skills.

**The Jan. 28 event includes several practical learning and hands-on stations:**

- **General Practice**, where students will learn how to perform a physical exam and explore key topics such as heartworm disease and intestinal parasites.
- **Emergency Medicine**, where students will learn how to perform CPR, bandage wounds and identify household items and foods that are harmful to pets.
- **Zoological Medicine**, where students will dive into the world of exotic animal medicine by learning the importance of animal husbandry and how to care for different species.
- **Dentistry**, where students will learn how to scale tartar off teeth, review dental radiographs and practice suturing using dental models.
- **Nutrition**, where students will learn the importance of proper nutrition and learn how to measure food appropriately to avoid obesity and associated diseases in pets.

**Returning students from previous years can take their expertise to the next level with an exciting lineup of advanced stations designed to deepen their knowledge and enhance their skills:**

- **Ophthalmology**, where students can gain hands-on experience, explore common ocular diseases, and refine suture techniques.
- **Clinical Pathology**, where students can practice drawing blood, prepare lab samples and examine what pet blood and skin look like under a microscope.
- **Large Animal Medicine**, where students will learn how to approach and handle horses, bandage legs and examine animals.
- **Forensic Veterinary Medicine**, where students will identify bones, use blood staining kits and learn about the daily responsibilities of forensic veterinarians in keeping animals safe.

"At NAVC, we are committed to creating pathways for young people from all backgrounds to discover and thrive in the field of veterinary medicine," said NAVC CEO Gene O'Neill. "Our partnership with blendVET enables us to provide students with hands-on learning experiences and mentorship in an industry that they may have never considered otherwise. Together, we are actively working to shape a more open and inclusive veterinary profession and we're thrilled to offer these opportunities for the third year in a row at VMX, where we connect students directly with mentors and hands-on learning experiences."

"Witnessing these young students' personal and professional growth while on their veterinary medicine journey is truly inspiring," said Dr. Bruno. "Our commitment to nurturing the next generation of veterinary professionals remains unwavering. We are deeply grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this vital mission and look forward to another successful year of empowering aspiring veterinarians."

Sponsored by Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health, Hill's Pet Nutrition, Merck Animal Health and VCA Animal Hospitals, participants in the program will receive a certificate acknowledging their completion of specialized education in veterinary medicine, marking an important step in their career path. This foundational knowledge is further supported by local veterinarians open to providing shadowing opportunities, which provide students with real-world experience and deepen their understanding of the field as they progress toward their educational milestones. Through these hands-on learning opportunities, students are encouraged to build confidence and practical skills within a supportive environment.

In addition to VMX, previous blendVET programs have been held in New Haven, CT, St. Petersburg, FL, and most recently, San Diego, CA.

*Photos and interviews are available. Photos from the Jan. 2024 blendVET event can be found [here](#).*

**About the NAVC**

The North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting and advancing veterinary professionals worldwide. As the world's leading provider of continuing veterinary education, the NAVC delivers essential training, tools and resources for veterinary professionals to stay abreast of advances in animal medicine and provide the best care for animals everywhere. Through its commitment to innovation and excellence, the NAVC has developed a diverse portfolio of products and services, including educational events, headlined by VMX (Veterinary Meeting & Expo), the world's largest, most comprehensive continuing education conference and launchpad for new products and innovations within the veterinary industry; VetFolio.com, a robust digital platform for virtual learning and engagement; NAVC Media, the veterinary industry's largest and award-winning portfolio of trade publications; and Embrace, an advocacy arm which unites the veterinary community and pet lovers. The NAVC was founded in 1982 and is headquartered in Orlando, FL. Since 2017, the NAVC has been recognized annually as one of the Top Workplaces by the Orlando Sentinel. To learn more about the NAVC's products and brands, visit <https://navc.com/>. To see our schedule of upcoming events, visit <https://navc.com/calendar/>.

### **About blendVET**

blendVET is a veterinary certification program in diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB). It is founded, owned and backed by a diverse group of leaders in veterinary medicine. blendVET is the first program designed to create an inclusive workplace culture geared toward fostering environments of belonging for teams and clients and creating the next generation of diverse veterinary professionals through student and parent programming.

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