

The Need for a Standard in Veterinary Technician Credentials



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Whether you are a part of the 81% who supported or remained neutral on the title change to “registered veterinary nurse” (RVN) or the 19% who preferred “veterinary technician” on the 2017 National Credential Survey, almost everyone agreed that standardizing of the profession’s credential requirements is important. In fact, of the 20% of respondents who were neutral, many commented that they had no preference for the exact title and wanted the profession to pick one and move forward. It is with this knowledge that NAVTA moved forward with the Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI), with 81% in agreement or content with the RVN title.

So why is standardizing of the credential so important?

“Veterinary Technician” Means Different Things

When looking at each US state and how veterinary technicians are regulated to promote public and animal health, we see that certified, registered, and licensed veterinary technicians are licensed by the state regulatory board in 39 states. In a good number of these states, laws restrict the use of the title “veterinary technician” to persons who acquire the license, commonly referred to as “title protection.” In the states that do not have title protection laws and the 11 states that do not have state regulation, the term “veterinary technician” can be used by any individual without meeting state license requirements of having an education in veterinary technology or passing a licensure exam. Private organizations in nonlicensure states issue certifications upholding the same or similar requirements, although these standards are unable to restrict the use of the term “veterinary technician.” This means that a “veterinary technician” can have varied levels of education and may or may not have passed a license exam.



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In many states, there is a scope of practice for credentialed veterinary technicians defined by law, restricting certain activities, such as administering anesthesia, bandaging and splinting, suturing of skin wounds, administering medication, performing diagnostics, and other nursing care, to those who are licensed. Many other states have no defined scope of practice, which means unlicensed individuals may be allowed to perform the same tasks as a licensed individual. This further clouds the definition of the term “veterinary technician” because an individual performing a specific nursing care task in many states may or may not be a credentialed veterinary technician yet look the same.

Now, don’t get us wrong here: There are plenty of seasoned individuals who are not licensed and quite competent at their job. However, the above 2 points create 4 different subsets of people who are all grouped together as “veterinary

technicians” (TABLE 1). While there are outliers to the general pattern, less education and less experience typically result in poorer-quality patient care, while more education and more experience result in better quality.

It is no wonder we run into frustration when we argue the value of a “veterinary technician” in practice regarding deserved pay, contribution to patient care, and the value brought to the veterinary team—we, the veterinary technicians, are pointing to the top and to the right, while those who don’t see value are likely pointing to the bottom and left (TABLE 1).

The Solution Is to Raise the Bottom Bar

Such an effect can be mitigated through raising of the bar from below to reduce the variability in the quality of individuals performing “veterinary technician” roles. One effective way to raise the bar is to establish licensure for the profession in every state that sets a standard in educational requirement for those entering the field. As the scope of practice is standardized, fewer lay persons will be performing tasks delegated to veterinary technicians and the true value of the profession will be evident. As licensing requirements become standardized, fewer individuals will be affected by the inability to transfer licenses when moving between states, and an agreement to allow practicing across state borders will be on the table. We have a long road ahead of us, and it must start with us, our generation, for the future generations.

The VNI encompasses the goal of standardizing the profession’s credential under the RVN title for this reason. Establishing said standards under an easily understood title in the initial states will create a model for other states to follow. In addition, the VNI supports all efforts bringing credential standards together across the nation, regardless of the pursued title. So, whether you support the title change or not, there is no time to waste. Stand up and work toward standardizing our credentials. We fight for the profession alongside each other. **TVN**

TABLE 1 Combination of Education and Experience of “Veterinary Technicians”

	JUST ENTERING THE FIELD	SEASONED IN THE FIELD
Associate’s or bachelor’s degree in veterinary technology	New graduates	Experienced credentialed veterinary technician
No formal education	Lay person	Experienced nonlicensed staff

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