



Perspectives on the Creation of Advanced Veterinary Nurse Degrees



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“80.06%, out of 703 respondents, are interested in the development of the conceptual APVN credential through a veterinary nursing graduate program.”

In human medicine, physician assistants and nurse practitioners are able to fill in the gaps of care in busy practices thanks to advanced training and certifications. With no direct comparison in veterinary medicine, questions arise: is there a path for establishing similar roles for veterinary nurses? And is there a willingness among veterinary nurses to invest the time and money to take the next step? While change in the profession does not happen overnight, there is an effort among leaders in the industry to expand scope of practice and even develop an advanced veterinary nursing degree, and a March 2020 study shows strong interest among veterinary nurses.¹ But, with ongoing struggles to standardize credentialing requirements nationally, concerns of adding another layer to our profession certainly exists. It's important to approach the issue in a way that advances the profession without adding more confusion.

NAVTA (navta.net) is working to improve professional recognition and expand career opportunities through the Veterinary Nurse Initiative. The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (rcvs.org.uk) in the U.K. is entertaining a recommendation to expand the scope of practice for Registered Veterinary Nurses by adding feline castrations, extending their role in anesthesia, and potentially allowing prescriber rights (medications not yet determined). And the Veterinary Innovation Council (VIC, navc.com/vic), a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting innovative solutions to key issues in the profession, has included an advanced veterinary nursing degree among the key focuses of its Building Better Teams initiative. The VIC plans to propose a master's degree program that would be offered by veterinary colleges, along with empowering the accreditation and certification process for this new role. Individuals with an Advanced Practice Veterinary Nursing (APVN) degree and credential would still work under a licensed veterinarian, and all of these prerequisites would create an expanded scope of practice that could potentially include diagnosis, varying degrees of prescriber rights, and/or performance of minor procedures. Veterinary Technician Specialists (VTS) are looked at as prime candidates, but it would potentially be available to those with a bachelor's degree in veterinary technology/nursing. The credential would allow highly trained individuals to bridge the gap between a credentialed veterinary technician and a veterinarian. The role is intended to improve access to care for pet owners and should create a new branch in a career pathway for veterinary nurses, which could increase demand for admissions into veterinary technology and nursing programs. It could also motivate professional growth and encourage professional leadership while providing a further step beyond VTS certification in a veterinary nurse's career path.

Is There Interest?

A recent study revealed that 80.06%, out of 703 respondents, are interested in the



development of a conceptual APVN credential through a veterinary nursing graduate program (TABLE 1).¹ When asked “How interested are you in having future career path options in veterinary nursing that may require more education for career advancement (e.g., clinical nursing, management, consulting, academia)?” 88.76% of the respondents indicated interest. Additionally, when questioned “How beneficial would a veterinary nurse graduate program be for the future of veterinary medicine and career advancement for the veterinary nurse?” 92% of respondents stated it would be beneficial. Personal/professional satisfaction, career advancement, and the possibilities of greater financial outlook were the top 3 reasons why this role is desired.

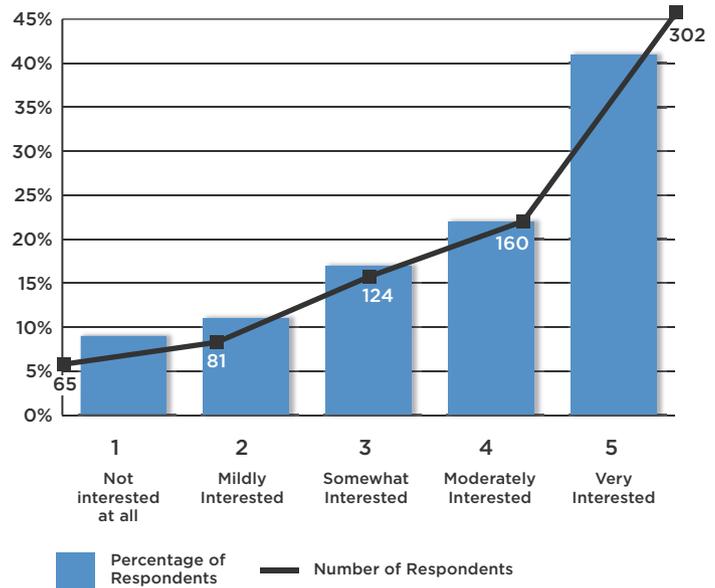
Future Outlook

An APVN program would produce competent professionals who serve as an extension of the veterinarian, requiring advanced clinical knowledge, critical thinking skills, and strong communication skills. Since APVNs would be credentialed veterinary nurses/technicians, they would aid in the recognition of the veterinary nursing profession and advocate for professional standards.

While there is significant interest for an APVN role from both veterinary technicians and veterinarians, there are also voices of concern. Common arguments against establishment of an advanced role include worries that the expansion of veterinary technician scope of practice will lead to competition with veterinarians for jobs and that veterinary technicians are often underutilized and underrecognized in their current state, issues that need to be addressed prior to an expansion in the scope of practice.

With the overall interest in the APVN model, there may be reason to couple it with the efforts to standardize our professional credentials. Taking a multimodal approach in implementing solutions addressing the future in addition to the present to ultimately reach the goal of having an improved career path for veterinary nurses is something to consider. Is pursuing this idea of an advanced degree going to lead to an expansion in the role of the veterinary nurse/technician and provide for new

TABLE 1 Interest in Graduate Program as an APVN Platform



ways to address problems within the field? Or should it be disregarded until more immediately urgent items such as standardization of our credentials are completely addressed?

We should consider the past, present, and future of our profession to guide efforts in elevating the profession today. If we have learned anything regarding our profession, it is that change takes time, but increased focus on elevating the role of veterinary nurses and creating a path for career development is positive in any form. We need to be having these conversations now, with our profession in the center of it so we can remain a voice in what happens. Do you feel standardization of the credentials is a present priority? Then join your national and state organizations in the ongoing efforts. Do you want to explore an APVN role as a future option for our profession? Join the discussion and make your case. **TVN**

References

1. Fults MK, Yagi K, Kramer J, Maras M. Development of advanced veterinary nursing degrees: rising interest levels for careers as advanced practice registered veterinary nurses. *J Vet Med Educ* 2020;e20190041 [online ahead of print].