Step Up for Stronger Title Protection

There is agreement among a majority of veterinary professionals: Title protection of "veterinary technician" is needed. But there is still work to be done, as this protection is missing in many states and misunderstood by many professionals, according to a new NAVTA report.[1]

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Title protection gives the credential of "veterinary technician" credibility by ensuring that only those who have met the educational standards and national examination process use the profession title. This article will cover the main takeaways from the NAVTA title protection report (**BOX 1**), which consists of 3 main sections. The first section characterizes the current state of title protection by canvassing the state veterinary practice acts. This section also creates categories based on how strong title protection is in each state. The second section reports on the survey results, giving insight into how the members of our profession feel about title protection (spoiler: It's very important), as well as the results of speaking to the regulatory bodies and practice management. The final section of the report describes various recommendations for legislators and regulatory agencies, practice management, veterinary advocacy organizations, and individuals to help strengthen title protection around the nation.

The Current Landscape

When looking at the current status of title protection, the Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI) Working Group found that there were 3 levels of protection state laws can specify. The first level is whether the state has a definition for what a veterinary technician is, thereby legally recognizing the profession. The second level is true title protection, which means that laws specifically state that the title "veterinary technician" is reserved for those who are credentialed as veterinary technicians, and that no others should use the title. The third level of protection is having penalties (fines or criminal penalties) specified for using the title without being credentialed, which improves the enforceability of the law. The VNI

BOX 1

"NAVTA Report Shows: Title Protection for 'Veterinary Technician' Is Needed and Desired, But Absent and Misunderstood in Most States" is the headline of the title protection report produced by the NAVTA Veterinary Nurse Initiative Working Group in February.[1] To see more data, read the report here: **bit.ly/36Z2hHY**.

Working Group concluded that 39 states have a definition, 21 states have title protection, and 5 states specify a penalty.[1]

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The Voice of the Profession

The VNI Title Protection Survey showed that the level of support for establishing title protection was the highest at 95.4% among credentialed veterinary technicians and 94.3% among veterinarians.[1] The level of support was consistently high across all states, areas of practice, the method of credentialing (e.g., grandfathered, alternate route, associate degree, or bachelor's degree), and years in practice. An interesting note from the survey: When respondents were asked if title protection existed in their state, only 60.9% of them answered the question accurately.[1] This could be an indicator that members of our profession are not as aware about title protection laws as we think, and/or that title protection laws around the states are too complicated to understand.

Another key set of questions asked by the survey was whether the respondents have filed a complaint with the veterinary medical board or approached their practice management regarding perceived title protection law violations and if that resolved the issues. Only 10.6% of the respondents had filed a complaint with the veterinary medical board, while 29.4% had approached their practice management.[1] This is likely because managers are much more accessible to veterinary team members than veterinary medical boards. Of those who filed a complaint to the veterinary medical board or approached their practice management, 17.9% and 28.5%, respectively, saw resolution afterward.[1] It is important to note that 41.8% of the people decided not to bring the issue up because they did not think it would make a difference.[1]

NAVTA encourages veterinary technicians to raise the issue with their veterinary medical board and practice leadership in a professional manner—because failing to bring an issue to light will lead to no resolution 100% of the time. Regardless, it is clear from the report that the vast majority of individuals in the veterinary profession are in favor of title protection and efforts should be directed at strengthening it across the nation.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The first of the report's recommendations called for legislators and regulatory agencies to establish title protection laws if they do not exist in the state and strengthen them in established states. For states with title protection, the veterinary medical boards should collaborate to establish a clear policy for enforcement in all states. Legislative and regulatory changes are created through a partnership between state and national advocacy organizations and the regulatory agencies. NAVTA has established an extensive state advocacy network through the District Representative system for states to strengthen the profession together. State veterinary medical and technician associations, in addition to working with regulatory agencies, should work to educate their members on proper title protection and foster a culture where there is mutual respect for credentialed veterinary technicians and non-credentialed individuals belonging to the same team. Academic institutions should also play a role in educating members entering the profession of credentialing issues, including title protection.

The true power for immediate change lies in the veterinary practice and individual team members' hands. Veterinary practices should employ policies that respect the veterinary nurse/technician's credentials and recognize the title while supporting and encouraging credentialing for those who want to pursue a career in veterinary nursing. Veterinary nurses/technicians must also take on the professional responsibility of staying up to date on the state laws and being an active participant in advocacy through NAVTA and state associations. If we want a voice, we must participate in a professional manner. The more people who participate, the larger our voice becomes, adding momentum behind the changes we want to see. Use the NAVTA Title Protection report as a tool to educate and take the next steps. We'll be right there alongside you. **TVN**

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References

1. National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America. *NAVTA Report Shows: Title Protection for "Veterinary Technician" Is Needed and Desired, But Absent and Misunderstood in Most States.* Published February 17, 2022. Accessed March 31, 2022. navta.net/news/navta-report-shows-title-protection-for-veterinary-technician-is-needed-and-desired-but-absent-and-misunderstood-in-most-states