During a recent conversation for a podcast, the host asked Ashli Selke, NAVTA president, a thought-provoking question, saying: “I have the impression that those who come into the veterinary profession are people who tend to have a difficult time advocating for themselves. Do you think that there is any truth to that?”

We have known that pay has been the No. 1 issue for individuals to stay in our profession. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the average wage of those reporting to be veterinary technicians and veterinary technologists is $17.74 per hour.\(^1\) While we know this is not simply a result of members of the profession failing to advocate for themselves, self-advocacy is a piece of the puzzle worth examining.

When speaking up for ourselves for better pay, we need to first be able to answer the question: How much should I be making?

**Information About Pay**

Earlier this year, the New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association issued its 2022 Wage Guidelines,\(^2\) advocating for the profession and providing employers a desired level of compensation for new and early career veterinary nurses/technicians.

The Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians has been running an annual Wage and Compensation Survey since 2014, providing members of the profession with information on average wages broken down by geographic region, years in practice, and area of practice, along with employment benefits. The most recent survey in 2021 indicated that 57.4% of the respondents were “satisfied with the total compensation package [their] employer provides.”\(^3\)

While the financial figures indicated in these reports are difficult to translate to the United States or globally as cost of living is not easily translatable, the act of issuing guidelines provides individuals with supportive comparisons that they can use when asking for fair compensation.

For information across the United States, NAVTA recently conducted an updated demographic survey collecting information regarding pay. The results are currently being prepared for publication, including a data set on respondents’ hourly wage at their primary employer. The results indicate that 60% of the respondents were earning between $16 and $25 per hour with a median of $23 per hour. The data collected by this survey indicate pay much higher than the BLS statistics, which could be an indication of increase in wages through 2022 or that those likely to respond to NAVTA’s survey are those who are credentialed and more engaged in
the field. Further breakdown of the information based on years of experience, type of practice, and credential status will be provided in the demographic survey report. There are also state associations conducting more localized wage surveys to report on financial figures relevant to their membership.

Movement Toward Pay Transparency
The concept of pay transparency has been around for a while and the pros and cons can be debated. When it comes to knowing how much one can earn by taking a job, Colorado leads the way by having the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act,\(^4\) which requires all job openings to list pay range and benefits. There are several other states that require pay to be disclosed upon request during the interview process.

There are also employers that have structures and frameworks in place that provide fair pay based on objective criteria, and some publish them. (The former is common, but the latter is not.) Public universities may have their employees’ wages published as public information. These pieces of information can be used as a form of comparison.

How to Advocate for Yourself
“Know what you are worth” is so much easier said than done. It’s the information above that will start to give us a better idea of what the industry standards look like around us. What we do know is that veterinary nurses and technicians are worth more than we currently are paid. If you are having trouble maintaining financial sustainability through your current wages, look toward a couple of factors in your practice: Does your employer have a structured framework that is transparent and provides fair pay in an objective manner? Is the pay scale assigned to the framework adequate and match what you are worth?

If the answer to either of these questions is no, then it is worth having a professional discussion with your practice leaders. Your best advocate is yourself. TVN

Editor’s Note: To read more about negotiating for a pay raise, see page 88.

References