Building Our Voice in Advocacy: The Government Relations Committee

It is no secret that many veterinary nurses/technicians are leaving the field after a fairly short career span, and the struggles remain the same: low pay, career stagnancy, and in many states little to no delineation between credentialed and noncredentialed team members. Some of the solutions lie in the education of veterinary leadership and others lie in the long game of passing legislation and assigning legal definitions for each role in a veterinary setting.

In the past several years, NAVTA has steadily built resources to strengthen its ability to advocate for the profession. First, the State Representative Committee was converted into the District Representative Committee and system, which serves as a bidirectional feedback and communication system between the national and state organizations. Through the years, the District Representative Committee has functioned as a network bringing state associations together to hold regional and national discussions and serve as representatives among veterinary leaders while gathering at veterinary summits.

Second, the Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI) was launched to promote credentialing and educational standards, raise public recognition, elevate professional recognition, and expand career potentials. Throughout the years, the VNI has raised awareness of credentialing issues, aided states in establishing credentials, conducted research on credential-related topics, and provided a voice for the profession. Through its activities, NAVTA further developed its mechanism of taking positions on a variety of issues, along with its awareness, involvement, and network in legislative action.

This is where the need to develop a committee for consistent day-to-day advocacy arose. Under the current NAVTA president, Ashli Selke, CVT, RVT, a new Government Relations Committee has been formed to:

- Assist veterinary nurse/technician leaders in each state in navigating the legislative process
- Build relationships to develop and collaborate on legislative initiatives
- Advocate for the advancement of credentialed veterinary technicians while legislative bills are moving through state legislative sessions

In recent years, many states have pushed legislation through to legally protect the veterinary technician title, outline scope of practice, recognize the veterinary technician specialist (VTS) titles, and more. This committee is serving as a resource for guidance and direction for this type of advocacy and advancement.
We Need to Work Together
Within NAVTA, the District Representative Committee, the VNI, and the new Government Relations Committee will work together to keep open lines of communication on legislative initiatives. Together, these groups will provide resources to all veterinary team members as well as others who are interested in national and state-level advocacy, clearly defining roles of each veterinary team member and building the connections needed to impact legislation. The district representatives will continue to serve as a communication conduit, the VNI will continue to conduct research and create credential standards recommendations and statements, and the Government Relations Committee will establish long-term relations that strengthen NAVTA’s ability to address legislative matters. It is with all 3 of these functions that our profession will continue to advance.

How to Help Advance My State
Every individual has the ability to contribute to legislative progress and should try. Here are some first steps:

● Connect with your state veterinary technician association to see what is being discussed.
● Define the changes you want to see in your state (title protection and definitions, Veterinary Technician National Exam eligibility, scope of practice, etc.) and clarify what you want the legislation to do—the legal verbiage can be written with help from legislators and their staff.
● Build rapport with your state veterinary medical association and the veterinary medical board.
● Pay attention to local elections and know who represents your area in the state house and senate; they are more likely to help you if they know you are a constituent (you can vote for or against them) and understand your goals.
● When it comes time to meet with them, have a a clear goal in mind and bring a 1-page paper to leave with your contact information.

If you are interested in meeting with members of the Government Relations Committee to discuss future legislative goals, feel free to reach out via your NAVTA district representative and/or emailing info@navta.net. TVN

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Learn More
NAVTA District Representative Committee
navta.net/volunteer-opportunities/district-representative-committee

NAVTA Government Relations Committee
navta.net/volunteer-opportunities/government-relations

Veterinary Nurse Initiative
veterinarynurse.org