

Getting to the Bottom of the Veterinary Technician Shortage in Minnesota

“Veterinary Technician Workforce Enhancement Act”

By Dr. Al Balay, Chair, MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee

The MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee intends to move forward with introducing legislation in Spring 2021 leading to mandatory licensure of Veterinary Technicians. We expect that the soonest legislation could be passed is during the 2022 Legislative session. The MVMA lobbyist strongly advised that the process start in 2021 which would include networking, education, and planning for implementation of the legislative action. The Committee believes that mandatory licensing will lead to less career turnover, greater retention, and less shortages of veterinary technicians.

Legislation would require opening the Veterinary Practice Act. The MVMA Board of Directors and the MVMA's Government Affairs Committee support opening the Veterinary Practice Act for Veterinary Technician licensure. The Veterinary Technician Committee is working with the Board of Veterinary Medicine on this initiative.

In this article, the fourth in the series, we will review key points of the proposed legislation including who can become licensed, “grandfathering”, hiring in our practices, and who is affected by having mandatory licensure.

What are the key components of the draft bill?

- Certified veterinary technicians (CVT's) currently in good standing with the MVMA are immediately eligible for licensure.
- Non-certified veterinary technicians, who have graduated from an accredited AVMA or CVMA (Canadian Veterinary Medical Association) veterinary technician program and passed the Veterinary Technician National Examination (VTNE), can become eligible if they are currently practicing, performed 4160 hours of experience within the previous 5 years, and have a letter of recommendation from a licensed veterinarian stating their competency.
- Licensed Veterinary Technicians (LVT's) and other veterinary team members cannot perform services which are exclusive to licensure responsibilities of the DVM (perform surgery, diagnose/prognose, or prescribe drugs).
- Veterinary team members not eligible for licensure or choosing not to be licensed are limited to provide support assistance under the supervision and direction of a licensed veterinary team member.

What is grandfathering and who will qualify?

Legislation associated with licensure may include a clause referred to as a “grandfathering” period. Final decision about a grandfathering clause will continue to be debated and ultimately decided by legislators when the bill is eventually heard in legislative committee. The MVMA Veterinary Technician committee has set

the bar high for the professional expectations of those that would “grandfather”. Legislators will also assume that in pursuing licensure that the veterinary committee will be seeking a higher standard associated with licensure status otherwise they will argue that certification should just be maintained. See Key Component bullet point #2. We are proposing that all veterinary team members not eligible or choose not to be licensed would be considered veterinary assistants. Any grandfathering provision included would likely include a sunset provision (phase out).

How do we hire who we need to allow us to run our practices OR what should I do when I cannot find a LVT to work in my practice?

Hire who you need to work in your practice! It is not the intent of this proposed legislation to limit employers in hiring. What will be different is that those employees not eligible to be licensed as Veterinary Technicians should be referred to as Veterinary Assistants. It is expected that the Board of Veterinary Medicine will promulgate regulations establishing health care tasks and the degree of supervision required for those tasks that may be performed only by a LVT.

What changes occur with mandatory licensure?

Veterinary team members most likely affected through mandatory licensure are those trained on-the-job or those unable to pass the VTNE. We understand that many clinics have outstanding staff members that have worked in the role as a Veterinary Technician for many years. They

can continue to work in the practice but will be referred to as Veterinary Assistants.

Another potential group that could be impacted by the legislation is veterinarians themselves if they do more clinical skills that should be delegated to supervised staff. We have heard from many experts in veterinary management that the success of the "team" is built on delegation and empowering team members to complete duties/skills.

Practice owners may feel concerned about the need to increase compensation to those licensed. Veterinary Technician salaries have not kept pace with the cost of inflation and a greater percentage of technicians are at the poverty level than just five years ago per U.S. government data. We also know from the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) surveys that one of the six reasons listed by technicians leaving the career field is low income*. Again, this is just one of several factors that needs to be evaluated by veterinary practices in Veterinary Technician retention.

Lastly, could current CVT's be affected? We expect there will be an increase in continuing education requirements and a possibility of an increased cost for licensure (versus certification). The Minnesota Board of Veterinary Medicine is working on a budget including projected licensure costs. Board Executive Director, Dr. Julia Wilson, does not expect a huge increase in the cost of licensure compared to the current voluntary certification, but she does not know the expected license cost at this time. We do know that during the first year there will be an increase in cost due to the need for licensed individuals to complete a Criminal Background Check the same as newly licensed veterinarians.

**See Messenger or Chronicle article #2 (September/October 2020) for the listed reasons.*

Your questions and feedback are appreciated. Contact Maria Nellessen, CVT at the MVMA Office or Dr. Al Balay, Chairperson of the MVMA Vet Tech Committee. You can contact Al at allen.balay@tds.net or 320-905-6423.