



Getting to the Bottom of the Veterinary Technician Shortage in Minnesota

By Dr. Al Balay

This is the first of a series of articles from the MVMA's Veterinary Technicians Committee. Your questions and feedback are appreciated. Contact Maria Nellesen (mariaN@mvma.org), CVT at the MVMA office or Dr. Al Balay, recently retired Director of Veterinary Technology at Ridgewater College and Chairperson of the MVMA Vet Tech Committee. You can contact Al at allenbalay77@gmail.com or 320-905-6423.

Do you know how many veterinary technology teaching programs there are in Minnesota?

There are four AVMA accredited programs in Minnesota. All are State colleges through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System. Rochester Community and Technical College, Vermillion Community College, Dakota County Technical College, and Ridgewater College. All four programs' graduates receive an Associate of Applied Science degree and the programs are 2 to 2 ½ years in length. All four programs have indicated to the MVMA vet tech committee that they are attempting to maximize enrollments to meet the shortage. In 2016, Minnesota had 12 veterinary technology programs. The closure of many programs occurred in private colleges by 2018. There are 211 AVMA accredited programs in the USA with the majority of them conferring the AAS degree with the graduate then officially called a veterinary technician. Of the 211 accredited programs, 25 are four-year degree programs leading to a Bachelor of Science degree and the graduates considered veterinary technologists.

Additionally, in Minnesota there is a veterinary assistant program at Hennepin Technical College. Graduates of Hennepin Tech do not qualify to become certified in MN as that program is too short in academic length and depth of instruction to become accredited by AVMA.

AVMA nomenclature for different professional roles:

- *Veterinary technician is a graduate of a two- or three-year AVMA CVTEA-accredited program in veterinary technology. In most cases the graduate is granted an associate degree or certificate.*
- *Veterinary technologist is a graduate of a four-year baccalaureate AVMA CVTEA-accredited program in veterinary technology.*
- *Veterinary assistant: The adjectives animal, veterinary, ward, or hospital combined with the nouns attendant, caretaker, or assistant are titles sometimes used for individuals where training, knowledge, and skills are less than that required for identification as a veterinary technician or veterinary technologist.*

Why are the terms (Certified, Licensed, Registered) different in States for veterinary technicians?

It is up to each state and their regulatory or licensing agencies to determine the correct term for a veterinary technician. The generic term for any veterinary technician who has met the requirements in a State is a "credentialed" veterinary technician. The credential varies for each State. Minnesota veterinary technicians are overseen through the MVMA and the appropriate credential term is "Certified Veterinary Technician" (*more on why MVMA oversees technician certification in future articles*).

What is the process to become a Certified Veterinary Technician in Minnesota?

To obtain the credential in Minnesota, a candidate must have graduated from an AVMA accredited veterinary technology teaching program, pass the VTNE (Veterinary Technician National Exam overseen by the American Association of Veterinary State Boards = AAVSB), apply for certification through the MVMA, and pay the certification fee. The entire process of certification, renewals, and questions is overseen by the MVMA. There is a credentialing subcommittee of the MVMA Veterinary Technician Committee to review VTNE scores and address questions or concerns of applicants.

Do you know when the first veterinary technician was certified in Minnesota?

1984 was the first year that certification was available in Minnesota. Initially, to become certified in MN, passage of both the National and State veterinary technician examinations were required. 1990 was the last year in Minnesota that someone who had not graduated from an accredited veterinary technology program was allowed to sit for the exams. The State examination was discontinued in 2009.

Do you know that Minnesota only has a voluntary credential for veterinary technicians?

State statute and the Veterinary Practice Act do not have any language officially regarding veterinary technicians in Minnesota. In fact, the MN Practice Act only defines veterinarians. All

others are considered unlicensed personnel. There are currently 2769 voluntarily certified veterinary technicians in MN. The MVMA Veterinary Technicians Committee would like to engage in more conversation about mandatory credentialing in Minnesota. There will be more discussion points and info to come in future newsletters but we believe that mandatory credentialing will lead to less career turnover, greater retention, and less shortages of veterinary technicians in Minnesota.

Listing of CVTs on MVMA Website Coming Soon!

Soon the MVMA will post active certification status for veterinary technicians online. You or your technician will be able to check the status of a technician's certification, date of original certification, and date of expiration. If your veterinary technician's name is not listed, their certification status could be pending or lapsed.

READY TO RE-ENTER THE VET TECH PROFESSION?

Have you kept up your vet tech certification but are not currently working in the field? Thinking you might someday want to get back to work in the veterinary profession? The University of Minnesota, Veterinary Medical Center may have the perfect opportunity for you!

We welcome your feedback as we explore options to hire CVT's in some capacity (part-time or full-time) to get paid to work while refreshing your technical skills - learning to use new medical equipment/technology and enhancing your resume in the process. We are a full service hospital, open 24/7, with many specialty areas available. If you would like more information, please contact Kim Horne at horne003@umn.edu or 612.624.8760.