

Getting to the Bottom of the Veterinary Technician Shortage in Minnesota

By Dr. Al Balay

This is the second of at least 4 articles from the MVMA's Veterinary Technicians Committee. The first article focused on terminology and the current process for voluntary certification of veterinary technicians in Minnesota. This article will detail some of the potential reasons for the shortage of veterinary technicians as well as other information. Future articles will focus on the issues of the shortage and the steps and costs of mandatory credentialing of veterinary technicians.

The MVMA Veterinary Technicians Committee would like to engage you in more conversation about mandatory credentialing in Minnesota. The committee believes that mandatory credentialing will lead to less career turnover, greater retention, and less shortages of veterinary technicians in Minnesota. Committee members are investigating retention data in different States as well as AVMA, National Association of Veterinary Technicians (NAVTA), and AAVSB (American Association of Veterinary State Boards) on information related to model practice acts and scope of practice regulations.

Do you know what the career life expectancy of a college-educated veterinary technician is?

A number of surveys tell us what we know which is that many technicians do not stay in the profession long. The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) has shared in the past that the average career life expectancy is between 5 – 7 years. The 2016 NAVTA survey of 2,790 respondents revealed that the six most significant problems that veterinary technicians face as individuals include: low income, burnout, lack of recognition, lack of career advancement, underutilization of skills, and competition with on the job trained technicians ([NAVTA 2016 Demographic Survey](#)). Those respondents in the survey who were very satisfied (51% of respondents) with their career choice tied their satisfaction to using the skills taught to credentialed veterinary technicians while in school. "Utilizing CVTs to their fullest extent increases job satisfaction tremendously". "Low income was by far the most significant problem facing VTs in 2016".

The most fulfilling aspects of the VT job from the 2016 NAVTA survey: caring for animals in the best way possible, making a difference in a pet's life, assisting in the diagnosis, and staying current on the science and technology of medicine.

Do you know what the economic impact of a credentialed veterinary technician on a veterinary practice is?

The 2010 AVMA economic survey revealed that a credentialed and fully utilized veterinary technician increases practice revenue by \$93,311. More recent sources have documented increases of \$160,000 year with some sources suggesting closer to \$250,000 (Association of Veterinary Technician Educators Symposium, August 2020). Dr Bob Lester writing in the February/ March 2020 edition of [Today's Veterinary Business](#) in the article titled "We can't afford to wait" indicates that there are two strategies veterinary practices can employ to "protect our profession from the disintermediation of veterinary services from veterinary professionals and simultaneously promote professional well-being". One of his strategies is to "better utilize veterinary nurses*". Dr. Lester lists the benefits of a veterinary nurse: "help more pets, more consumer confidence, reduce barriers to care, improve professional well-being, improve practice financial well-being, improve veterinary nurse recruitment and retention, and improved value to consumers".

** Note: Dr. Lester is using the term veterinary nurse as an alternative to veterinary technician. The MVMA Veterinary Technician committee is not focused on veterinary nurse verbiage.*

Do you know the most recently identified factors associated with job satisfaction of veterinary technicians?

A recent [Journal of the American Veterinary Medicine Association article](#) (JAVMA, September 1, 2020, Vol. 257, No. 5) titled Factors associated with job satisfaction and engagement among credentialed small animal veterinary technicians in the United States identified both positive and negative factors associated with job satisfaction.

This article is worth reading for employers. Of note the survey only includes those veterinary technicians with three years or more of full-time employment. One positive was identified as hourly wage with those veterinary technicians earning at least \$21/hour reporting significantly higher overall job satisfaction.

The median wage reported for veterinary technicians in 2018 (most recent year of data as reported by National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and AAHA) was \$14 - \$16 per hour. The NAVTA survey also shows that benefits have improved. Another interesting response from the NAVTA survey was that 68% of practices schedule veterinary technician specific appointments.

How long has the MVMA had a Veterinary Technician committee and how long has the MAVT been working with MVMA?

MVMA first appointed an "Animal Technicians Committee" in 1969 due to the early establishment of training programs and concerns over regulation. By 1973, the committee implemented a procedure for "registering" veterinary technicians. By the end of 1973, 78 veterinary technicians had been registered.

The Animal Technicians Committee presented programs for technicians at the 1974 and 1975 MVMA annual meeting. In 1974, 130 technicians attended the annual meeting! At the 1975 annual meeting, veterinary technicians formed the Minnesota Association of Veterinary Technicians. Since then, MAVT and MVMA have held their annual meetings in conjunction. A credential committee was established in 1983 to develop a certification program for veterinary technicians. The first Certification Examination in Minnesota was June 23, 1984 for 167 technician candidates.

"The general public does not understand what veterinary technicians do; therefore, it should be the responsibility of every State and National association to create a consumer education campaign in order to increase the comprehension of the care provided by credentialed veterinary technicians."

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.