

# 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 introduced legislation during the 2021 legislative session leading to licensure of Veterinary Technicians. Be sure to check out the resource available on the MVMA website for more information. Under Veterinary Technicians and then “Veterinary Technician Licensure” is the current info including a very helpful FAQ, all the articles, Key Components of the bill, a recording of an information session, and other supportive documents and links. You will also find contact information if you have more questions or concerns. In this article #7 in the series, we share an update of upcoming activities as well as more advice on retaining veterinary technicians in the career.

In September, watch for a short electronic survey coming to all MVMA members asking questions whether you’ve gotten enough information and about your level of support of the legislative initiative. We hope to use a similar survey with MAVT members, and all technicians currently (and voluntarily) certified through the MVMA. There will be a short turnaround time to respond to the survey so that we can gather data before hosting four upcoming regional meetings of both veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Watch for more information and invitations to these regional meetings. The first regional meeting is scheduled in conjunction with the MVMA Board meeting in Rochester on October 14<sup>th</sup>. The regional meetings will have refreshments and include updates from MVMA leaders about the Companion Animal Board proposed legislation, the MVM Foundation, and information sharing about the legislative initiative to license veterinary technicians. Regional meetings are proposed in Detroit Lakes and Southwest Minnesota yet this fall. We anticipate participation and will also provide these updates at the Arrowhead CE meeting scheduled for December 4<sup>th</sup> in Duluth.

What else is MVMA doing to minimize the shortage of technicians other than the legislative initiative? Kim Horne, CVT, and Al Balay are working with the Board of Veterinary Medicine in an on-going basis about scope of practice and cost of licensure. Our next meeting with the BVM is on September 8<sup>th</sup>. Al joined in a two-day conference of the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC) in July. The focus of the conference was addressing the shortages of veterinary technicians and how veterinarians can better utilize technicians’ skills. Dr. Mark Stetter, Dean at Colorado State University stated that potentially there will be a shortage nationally of 100,000 veterinary technicians by 2030. He also shared that a veterinary practice could have a 18% increase in practice revenue with one veterinary technician. Additionally, he stated that veterinarians only utilize 30% of a veterinary technician’s capabilities. Dr. Pete Bill, Professor Emeritus from Purdue University said that we’ve had “45 years of not fixing the utilization issue”. He is on an AVMA committee that is developing an instrument to evaluate and compare how a veterinary technician is utilized. Watch for the Veterinary Technician Utilization Index (VTUI) in the future from AVMA. AVMA already has resources available to members on utilizing veterinary technicians to improve practice success. There is a free CE webinar worth 1 CE credit available also to AVMA members: “How well do you utilize veterinary technicians?”.

Also, at the AAVMC conference, Dr. Rochelle Low, from the Mars Vet. Health with veterinary clinics in 21 countries including Banfield, Blue Pearl, and VCA veterinary hospitals shared that by scheduling over 15,000 veterinary technician appointments weekly at Banfield is impacting retention. Several speakers talked about the importance of empowering veterinary technicians and increase job satisfaction by allowing the technicians to do more skills with indirect supervision. If you haven't looked at the MN proposed legislative language where both direct and remote supervision are listed, you are encouraged to look at the bill language on the MVMA website.

Lastly, Dr. Jessica Fox has some intriguing data soon to be published and shared about controlled substance drug diversion by veterinary clinic personnel including veterinary technicians. Previously, we've shared that one of the key points of licensing veterinary technicians will be improved public safety due to State oversight of their licenses. Currently if veterinary technician or other veterinary clinic personnel are caught diverting controlled substances, they can be discharged from employment and potentially prosecuted locally. However, there is nothing from an oversight standpoint to keep that technician from gaining employment at another veterinary facility. With Board of Veterinary Medicine oversight, drug diversion could likely lead to loss of licensure.

Now is the time to reduce the shortage of veterinary technicians by legally defining them in the Minnesota Veterinary Practice Act and officially recognizing them as partners in the veterinary health care team. MVMA leadership and Veterinary Technician Committee believe that licensure will lead to less career turnover, greater retention, and fewer shortages of veterinary technicians. Please participate in the September survey and in the upcoming regional meetings.