

A Note on the Roles and Responsibilities of Para-Veterinary Worker

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Editorial Note

A para-veterinary worker is a veterinary science expert who, as part of a veterinary aid system, performs procedures autonomously or semi-autonomously. Veterinary nurse, veterinary technician, and veterinary assistant, as well as versions with the prefix 'animal health,' are widespread job titles around the world.

The scope of practice differs by country, with some permitting suitably qualified para-veterinary workers to operate independently, including minor surgery, while others limit their personnel to aiding veterinarians.

Veterinary technicians are para-veterinary workers in North America who have completed a term of study, passed a test, and have a specific field of expertise. A technician degree in Veterinary Technology is needed of veterinary technicians. Veterinary technicians must be registered in most Canadian provinces, and veterinarians must hire registered veterinary technicians by law. In the United States, credentialed veterinary technicians must complete an American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)-approved Veterinary Technician program, the majority of which are 2 things that award an Associate of Science (or Associate of Applied Science) degree in Veterinary Technology. To get credentialed in their state, graduates must pass the VTNE (Veterinary Technician National Exam). Every two years, these certifications (whether Licensed [LVT], Registered [RVT], or Certified [CVT]) must be renewed, with standards varied by state.

Human nursing associations have frequently gained control of the term "nurse." This is protected by law in some countries, including in the United States, 39 states have title protection for "Nurse," with Nursing Practice Acts requiring that only Registered Nurses (RNs) use the title.

Veterinary nurses were referred to as 'registered animal nursing auxiliaries' in the United Kingdom until 1984, in line with the naming convention at the time for less qualified aids in human nursing, referred to as 'nursing auxiliaries.'

Only seven countries (out of 195) have a recognized para-veterinary profession, and those employees are referred to as "Veterinary Nurse" in those countries: Registered Veterinary Nurses in the United Kingdom, Registered Veterinary Nurses in Ireland (a profession in its infancy). Only one state in Australia has veterinary nurses (Queensland). A VN title, on the other hand, can be obtained with little schooling and merely a certificate. Voluntary credentialing became available in a few other states, although it is still a young profession.

Vet Technicians, on either hand, have a three-year degree from a university school. The curriculum is not controlled by industry or government in any way, and practical skills are not assured; rather, this degree requires greater in-depth study and exposure to much higher level skills.

Both Registered Veterinary Nurses and Veterinary Technicians are needed in New Zealand. Veterinary technicians have a higher educational level (3 years of school as opposed to 2), Veterinary Nurse and Animal Health Technician in South Africa.

The AHT is more akin to a Nurse Practitioner (in the US), aka a mid-level medical practitioner, and each title given has its own course. Veterinary nurses in South Africa are more similar to veterinary assistants in the United States.

In the United States, there is an attempt to change the title of credentialed Veterinary Technicians; however legislative initiatives in all four states where the name change has been suggested so far have failed. The VNI has spent more than 200,000 dollars with no clear accounting of how the money was used and no results.

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