

Getting to the Bottom of the Veterinary Technician Shortage in Minnesota

By Dr. Al Balay

The MVMA Veterinary Technicians Committee would like you to engage in more conversation about mandatory licensure of Veterinary Technicians in Minnesota. The committee believes that mandatory licensing will lead to less career turnover, greater retention, and less shortages of veterinary technicians.

This is the 3rd of on-going articles from the MVMA's Veterinary Technicians Committee. Your questions and feedback are appreciated. Contact Maria Nellessen, 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 allen.balay@tds.net or 320-905-6423.

In previous articles, we've addressed reasons for the shortage. The Veterinary Technicians Committee intends to move forward with legislation in spring 2021 of leading to mandatory licensure. 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. Here is the motion from November's Government Affairs Committee: Recommend that the MVMA support the MVMA/MAVT joint efforts to enable veterinary technicians to be included in the veterinary practice act.

In this article, we'll explore the process as well as the advantages and disadvantages of mandatory licensure.

What is the process to result in mandatory licensure of veterinary technicians in Minnesota?

We know that oversight and regulation of licensed technicians will be by the Board of Veterinary Medicine (BVM). The Veterinary Technicians Committee is working with the BVM through Dr. Julia Wilson. Dr. Al Balay will meet with the BVM in February 2021. Licensure requires opening the Veterinary Practice Act and new BVM Rules.

The MVMA Veterinary Technicians Committee will discuss Practice Act and Scope of Practice language at its January 2021 meeting. The Committee will also scrutinize how to meet the Minnesota's "Criteria for Regulation" which states that no regulation shall be imposed upon any occupation unless required for the safety and well-being of the citizens of the State. To open the Practice Act will require identification of Legislators to introduce the legislation. The MVMA Lobbyists are recommending that legislation is initiated in the second half of the 2021 legislative session with hope that legislation might be passed in 2022.

What are the advantages of mandatory licensure of veterinary technicians in Minnesota?

As has been stated, we believe that mandatory licensing will lead to less career turnover, greater

retention, and less shortages of veterinary technicians. Mandatory licensure will promote greater numbers of graduates to sit for the Veterinary Technician National Examination leading to more technicians exhibiting entry-level competency.

The Veterinary Technician committee members believe that licensing will lead to improved patient care and improved efficiency for veterinary practices resulting in increased revenue. Mandatory licensure improves consumer protection and public safety due to veterinary technicians' knowledge especially in areas of zoonoses, infectious disease control, and pharmacology.

Mandatory licensure provides greater State oversight of all activities of veterinary technicians through the BVM. Oversight will increase accountability and provide a mechanism for investigation of professional errors, misconduct, unethical behavior, and drug diversion. Mandatory licensure will provide title protection for those that have earned the right to be licensed veterinary technicians. Mandatory licensure sets a professional standard for training and skills for veterinary technicians ensuring that these standards are maintained through continuing education requirements. Licensure of veterinary technicians empowers them to assist with national disasters. In order to perform

veterinary technicians' tasks in a disaster situation, veterinary technicians must have an active credential in their state of origin.

According to Dr. Julia Wilson, opening the Veterinary Practice Act would be an opportunity to remove outdated or murky language in other parts of the Practice Act.

What are the disadvantages of mandatory licensure of veterinary technicians in Minnesota?

A number of potential disadvantages and questions about mandatory licensure have arisen over the years. The MVMA Veterinary Technicians Committee is aware of the concerns and is hoping to allay and answer all of the questions.

Mandatory licensure requires opening of the Practice Act which could have negative consequences due to others influencing language in the Act. Identifying Veterinary Technicians in the Practice Act would likely classify anyone else working in a veterinary facility as "veterinary assistants" or "others". Will the public have a better understanding of the skills and responsibilities of those that work in veterinary facilities? Will we be able to demonstrate enough evidence of improved public safety and well-being of the State's citizens?

Mandatory licensure will lead to increased costs of the license compared to the voluntary certification costs. All license fees must generate enough revenue to cover the BVM costs to oversee those licensed. Currently the BVM is attempting to estimate the number of individuals that are non-certified veterinary technicians (both graduates of AVMA accredited programs that were never certified and those trained on the job who might desire licensure). This estimate is crucial for the BVM to build a budget and identify the licensure costs. We do anticipate that all initial licensees would need to have a Criminal Background Check which may cost about \$40.00. Dr. Wilson anticipates that license costs for veterinary technicians would be less than costs for veterinarians but does not have an estimate at this time.

Mandatory licensure could lead to potential professional liability for veterinary technicians depending on language and rules. Most States expect that the liability for professional care is the responsibility of the veterinarian. A great deal

of care and scrutiny will be needed to ensure that language and rules are carefully written so that licensed technicians will not need to carry professional liability insurance.

As mentioned previously, a period of time generally considered for a grandfathering clause would likely be written into the rules after successful legislation. This clause would allow for a period of time (generally two or three years) for those individuals who are not currently certified (graduates who did not become certified previously or previous CVTs that have allowed their certification to lapse AND those trained on the job) to become licensed. There would be criteria relative to the number of documented hours actively engaged in the practice of veterinary technology and a letter of recommendation stating competency from a licensed Veterinarian who is currently associated with the applicant. Many currently certified technicians have expressed concerns/frustration with a lenient Grandfather clause, so effective communication to educate them will be necessary as Grandfathering will be an expectation for a successful legislative process. The positives of grandfathering those currently working as non-certified technicians will be the need for required continuing education and BVM oversight.

The last potential disadvantage is the fear of practices that they cannot find or hire a certified veterinary technician. It will be incumbent to scrutinize the language and rules so that employers especially in rural areas can hire who they need to in order to run their practices.

Listing of CVTs now on MVMA Website

The status of a technician's certification is now available on the MVMA website under the Vet Tech tab, titled "[Verify a CVT](#)". Users can 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. Veterinary technician certification is based on information and data submitted, reviewed, and updated periodically. If you have questions regarding the accuracy of this information please contact the MVMA office.