

**May 6, 2022**

### **Veterinary Board of Governors approves technician program opposed by the veterinary profession**

At their May 5 special meeting, the Veterinary Board of Governors (VBOG) voted to endorse a proposed apprenticeship program for veterinary technicians, a decision that has upset several state and national veterinary associations. The proposal was brought forward by Cascade Veterinary Clinics (CVC) in central Washington and the North Central Workforce Development Council (NCWDC) as an answer to the local shortage of veterinary technicians. The Board's vote concluded a two-year process.

#### **Lack of accreditation**

The main reason for the opposition from veterinary leaders is the program's lack of accreditation by the AVMA Committee on Veterinary Technician Education & Activities (CVTEA), the gold standard in veterinary technician education. The CVTEA requires that graduates of accredited programs must demonstrate proficiency in over 300 essential skills and guarantees a rigorous education where graduates are fully capable of performing in a wide variety of professional roles across all sectors of veterinary medicine. The apprenticeship program does not meet these stringent requirements and focuses mainly on small companion animal medicine.

In addition to educational requirements, accreditation ensures proper physical facilities, equipment and student safety, ensures sustainable financial support, maintenance of animal welfare requirements, adequate library and information resources, and fair admission policies.

The lack of accreditation also means there will be no outside, independent oversight by the AVMA CVTEA or an agency that has veterinary expertise. The program will be monitored by non-veterinary personnel with no experience in veterinary medicine at the WA Dept. of Labor & Industries and the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council (WSATC).

#### **License portability**

A lesser reason but still one of concern is that the program will make it more difficult for graduates to leave Washington and work in other states. The American Association of Veterinary State Boards has promoted the idea of standardized licensure requirements across the U.S to allow for easier movement between states, but VBOG maintains that what happens in other states is not their purview. That may be true, but putting up more roadblocks for veterinary professionals in a highly mobile society can add to the stress and burnout already being experienced by our Washington technicians.

The veterinary organizations opposed to the program reads like alphabet soup. Both the WSVMA and the Washington State Association of Veterinary Technicians (WSAVT) opposed the program. The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA), the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (AVTE), and the Registered Veterinary Technologists and Technicians of Canada (RVTTC) also actively opposed it.

CVC's answer to the veterinary technician shortage is countered by the many realities already documented in the profession. Veterinary technicians are leaving the profession in high numbers from not being able to make an affordable living, from a lack of respect, from not being utilized in the skills and tasks for which they've been educated and can legally perform, and from burnout. Half the number

of veterinary technicians leave within their first five years. The problem isn't the number of technicians entering the profession, it's the number exiting.

Some within the Washington veterinary community believe that outlawing Washington's on-the-job training as a pathway to veterinary technician licensure in 2010 is the reason for creating the shortage, but the data gathered across the country indicate otherwise.

Washington state is big on apprenticeships and is working to get more of them established. During meetings with VBOG, NCWDC representatives frequently cited how if it works for cosmetology, it will work for veterinary technicians, comments that drew the ire of many. They cited programs for certified nursing assistants (CNA) and medical assistants (MA) that are coming online soon as proof that medical professionals can be apprentice-trained. However, the required skills and tasks for CNAs and MAs can hardly be compared to those of a licensed veterinary technician whose skills are equivalent to nurses.

Next, the WSATC will consider whether to support the program. Since the state considers apprenticeship programs to be important to getting people to work, it's expected that it will be approved. This will open the door for the program to be replicated elsewhere in the state.

The VBOG is comprised of five veterinarians, one veterinary technician and one public member. Three new members joined last month to fill vacant positions. Two of them, former state legislator and WSVMA past president Dr. Kathy Haigh and WSU/CVM faculty and former Teaching Hospital Director Dr. Debra Sellon, opposed the program, but it wasn't enough to prevent it from moving forward.

During the meeting, CVC portrayed the veterinary profession as being protectionist and resistant to change, but let's remember a big reason why the 2010 law was put into place eliminating OTJ style training. Rapid medical and scientific advances require educational experts to train technicians with the most up-to-date information. The change elevated technicians. This new apprenticeship program is a giant step backwards.

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