

Staff Titles in Veterinary Practices by Grant Miller, DVM, CVMA Director of Regulatory Affairs

The use of terms and titles when identifying members of the veterinary practice team must take into consideration certain legal title protections. Staff name tags, business cards, the practice website, and other advertisements should be based on titles officially recognized by state law. Specifically, the law allows for three terms to be used in identifying staff members in a veterinary practice: veterinarian, registered veterinary technician (RVT), and veterinary assistant (VA).

Veterinarian Title Protection

The California Business and Professions Code section 4826(f) states that in regard to representing oneself as a veterinarian, the following applies:

Uses any words, letters, or titles in such connection or under such circumstances as to induce the belief that the person using them is engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine, veterinary surgery, or veterinary dentistry. This use shall be prima facie evidence of the intention to represent himself or herself as engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine, veterinary surgery, or veterinary dentistry.

In a veterinary practice, only veterinarians may use designations that include the prefix Dr. and/or the suffixes DVM, VMD, BVSc, or other veterinary degrees. The Veterinary Medical Board has indicated that veterinarians should utilize the title conferred upon them by the degree they earned. For example, if a veterinarian graduates from a school which confers the title of Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, then the veterinarian should use the title DVM after his or her name. If the licensee attended a veterinary school that grants a BVSc title, then it should be utilized. The VMB has also stated that a veterinarian can use the title "Veterinarian" or "California-Licensed Veterinarian" after his or her name.

RVT Title Protection

The California Business and Professions Code section 4839.5 states:

No person shall use the title 'registered veterinary technician' or 'veterinary technician,' or any other words, letters, or symbols, including, but not limited to, the abbreviation 'R.V.T.,' with the intent to represent that the person is authorized to act as a registered veterinary technician, unless that person meets the requirements of Section 4839.

Terms such as animal health technician or AHT should not be used in California because they are not legally recognized by state law. Even persons who have acquired LVT, CVT, or AHT status in other states should not use that designation here because it implies RVT status and therefore violates section 4839.5.

Veterinary Assistant Designation

Veterinary practice staff members other than veterinarians or RVTs should be deemed veterinary assistants. The *Veterinary Medicine Practice Act* currently utilizes the terms "unregistered assistant" as well as "veterinary assistant," however Assembly Bill 1839 (Ma) signed into law in 2012 officially replaces "unregistered assistant" with "veterinary assistant" throughout the act. These changes should be reflected in future versions of the *Veterinary Medicine Practice Act*.

Avoid Extraneous Titles

The term "veterinary nurse" does not fall within any of the legally recognized designations within the veterinary practice and furthermore constitutes title infringement based on the California Business and Professions Code section 680:

In the interest of public safety and consumer awareness, it shall be unlawful for any person to use the title "nurse" in reference to himself or herself and in any capacity, except for an individual who is a registered nurse, or a licensed vocational nurse, or as otherwise provided in Section 2800.

Following title regulations will avoid title infringement lawsuits from other professions as well as help to keep clients informed about who they are communicating with in regards to their animal. Effective communication helps to avoid client issues and complaints and proper use of titles is a key component to that communication.

The CVMA Certified Veterinary Assistant Program

The CVMA CVA program combines 600 hours of on-the-job training with online educational materials, including videos and documents.

For more information, call Laura Phillips at the CVMA at 800.655.2862 or visit the CVA page at cvma.net.