

Practice Concepts

How We Propose to Recognize and Use Animal Health Technicians

Dr. Samuel Hutchins, South Barre, Vermont—Chairman
Dr. Ben Harrington, Raleigh, North Carolina—Co-Chairman

Opening Remarks

Dr. Ben Harrington, AABP Delegate to the AVMA House of Representatives

I would like to mention a few points about the training of animal technicians. The AVMA has formed a committee, which is a sub-committee of the Council on Education, to undertake the accreditation of training programs of animal technician schools.

The name of the committee is "Committee on the Accreditation of the Training of Animal Technicians." (CATAT). We are pleased with their progress; we have had eight site visits and eight schools have been accredited. I represent large animal practice on this committee.

We have discussed what schools to accredit and what they should teach. It soon became obvious that it would be easier to specify things that we would accept. The three main factors were that we would not accredit programs that taught students how to diagnose *per se*; programs that taught surgery; or how to prescribe drugs. If we keep these in mind, we have a good guide to go by. There was a lot of discussion about surgery but we felt that there is a lot of difference in the states, so it was excluded. The intent of the policy is to train students to assist veterinarians. The program is not designed to let them go out on their own or on farms or other areas—but to fit into a hospital operation, etc. We have used eight of these students in our practice for large and small animal work. They have helped us considerably.

Technicians are here to stay. There is obviously a lot of controversy in this area but we must find out how to use them in large animal practice. There are about 50 schools for animal technicians at present. Probably about 35 of these will qualify eventually with a two-year program of studies under our guidelines. They must have a veterinarian on their teaching program. I have not received a complaint about a graduate technician so far. Please feel free to contact me any time as your representative. Dr. Leland West represents the AVMA and we have had good guidance from our national organization. The

site visitation team is made up of one CATAT member, one state appointed representative who is usually on the advisory committee to the school and the other is Dr. Leland West.

The function of CATAT is to train the student, but the State Practice Act controls how they are used. Registration is better than licenses for the former means that the technician works with the veterinarian.

CATAT strongly recommends that schools training technicians should not be involved in a fee paying practice, but use their own animals. The school must specify its area of prime interest. We feel that even though their main interest is small animals, for example, they should be able to adapt to other areas in a practice.

District I

Dr. Samuel Hutchins III
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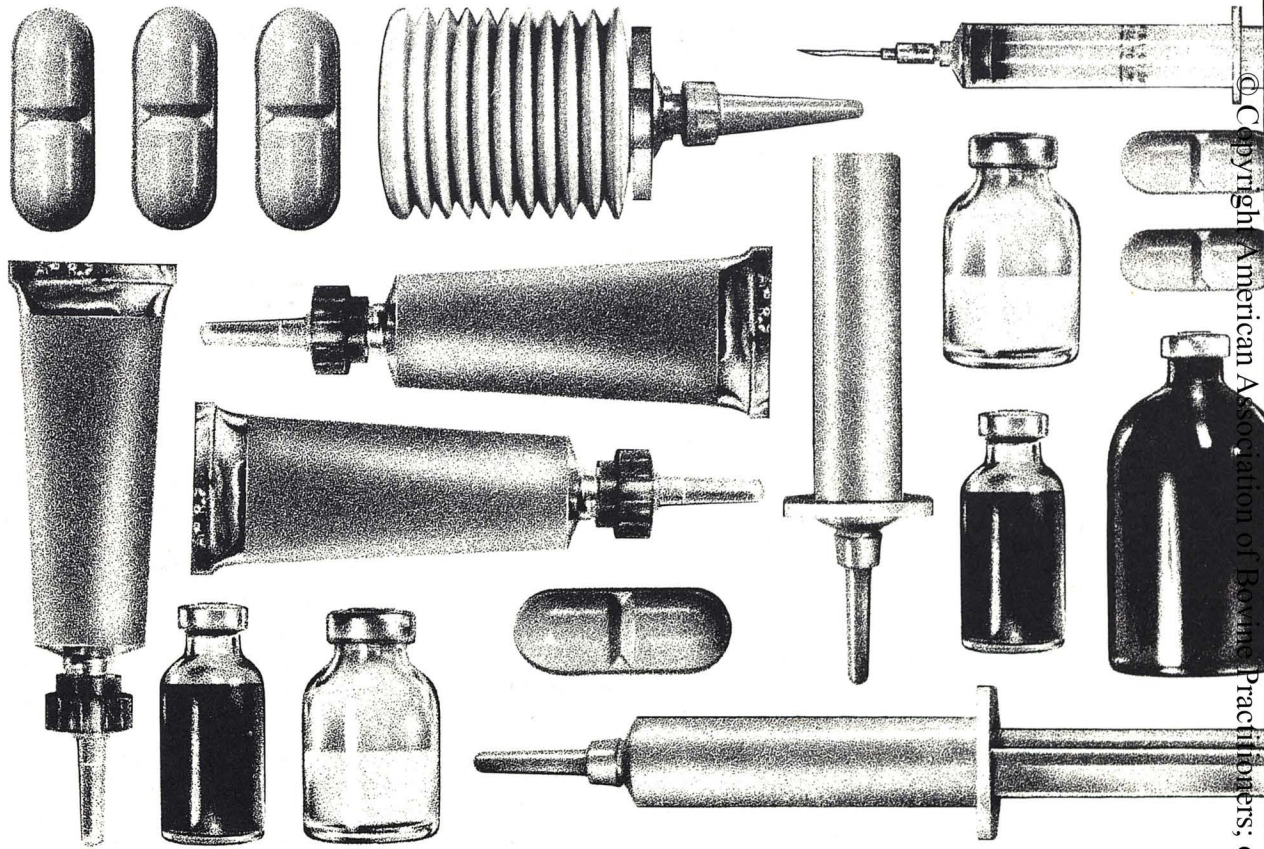
Dr. Roland Whitehead, committee man from District I, was unable to attend this meeting so I will discuss the results of the survey taken in District I which is made up of New England and New York.

First, let me emphasize that the term "animal technician" as used in this survey was broader than Dr. Harrington's definition. We included any lay help used by AABP members in large animal practice. We wanted to know how AABP members were using lay help at the present time.

About one third of the membership returned the survey and of these, 40% used lay assistants to some degree in cattle practice. This varied from driver-helpers to five graduates of a two-year program and one man who uses a third year veterinary student in the summer. These people had used animal technicians for six months to 35 years.

How are these people used? Three-fourths of them were used in small animal and equine practice as well as cattle practice and if I can read between the lines, this was their primary reason for being hired.

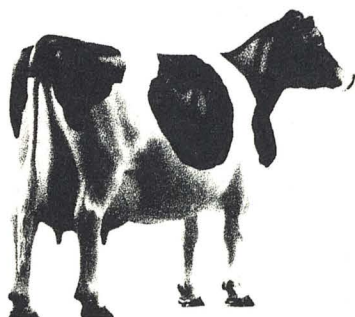
The work performed by animal technicians



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appeared to be directly related to their training. Seventy-five percent performed some laboratory procedures including all the formally trained ones. One third of these performed only in this capacity in the dairy practice.

Most technicians administered medications, drew blood samples for the lab, assisted in major abdominal surgery, administered anesthetics, assisted on O.B. procedures, took milk samples and assisted with X-ray procedures.

Some technicians did dehorning, vaccinations, trimming of feet, artificial insemination and infused uteruses.

Only one technician did any castrations and none were used for pregnancy palpation, wound suturing, milking machine analysis or taking feed samples.

Most of these procedures were done with the veterinarian present and technicians were rarely used for emergency treatments.

The salary scale for two-year graduates was from \$6250 and an apartment to \$10,000 a year, which averages out to about \$145 to \$185 per week. The laymen that were trained by the veterinarian had a lower pay scale—from \$100 per week to a high of \$160. Sixty percent of the doctors returning the survey did not use laymen to help them and two-thirds of these had no intention of ever hiring any help. They gave three basic reasons for this attitude: (1) did not feel a need for help; (2) specialized practice, i.e., sterility, military, university; and (3) declining practice and economic worries. One man said he just liked to practice alone.

As to the various states, New York is trying to change their Practice Act but is still having problems with the legislature: Vermont is studying the problem with regard to changing their Practice Act.

Delphi is the only school that can be accredited and hopefully will be done in the near future. The University of Maine has a good program for small animals and with some change of program may become accredited in the future.

District II

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Practitioner

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District II of the American Association of Bovine Practitioners in the Mid-Atlantic area of the country covers the states of New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. We are not a heavy bovine area and do not use animal technicians in cattle practice to a great extent. District II of this Association has almost 150 members.

In the early fall, I sent out a questionnaire to our members. The questions were as follows:

1. Do you use animal technicians?
2. If not, why?
3. In what areas?
4. What restrictions should be placed on them?
5. How could technicians be used to your best advantage?

There was also room for comments. The questionnaire was to help me in organizing the many different impressions my colleagues have on animal technicians. Approximately 50% responded, many with good ideas.

About 20% of those responding employed animal technicians. I concluded from the responses, however, that a good portion of these technicians were being used wholly for the small animal portion of the practices. I also found that most veterinarians who use animal technicians also trained them. Less than 20% of the technicians had formal training. This training varied from a few months to two years. Salaries were also diverse, ranging from \$75 to \$200 per week. This averages from \$3,900 to \$10,000 each year.

The areas of work where animal technicians are engaged in bovine medicine are numerous. The following is a list where they are currently being used, and includes some suggestions as to the technician's proposed future use.

1. Stocking and driving vehicles
2. Drug inventories
3. Animal restraint
4. Uterine infusions
5. Artificial inseminating
6. Hoof trimming
7. Castrations
8. Dehorning
9. Mixing and administering vaccines
10. Dressing wounds
11. Radiology - exposure and developing
12. Office laboratory procedures
13. Milk sampling and plating
14. Preparing medicines
15. Regulatory testing
16. Keeping records
17. Surgical assistance
18. Preparing surgical packs.

This list basically should be used as a guideline; in other words, limit the animal technician to the point where he does not have to make decisions.

State and federal veterinarians utilize animal technicians to a great extent. They refer to them as livestock inspectors and orient their duties toward regulatory work.

The reason given by those responding as to why they did not use animal technicians in bovine practice were many and varied. Some felt their practice would not support a technician either because of approaching retirement or because their practice was newly established. A few of the veterinarians felt they could practice better as individuals. Most of those responding felt their practice could not utilize a technician's complete capabilities on a full-time