

The Use of the Veterinary Technician in Bovine Practice

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As a lot of you know, there is a kind of controversy within our profession now on the use of animal technicians. North Carolina developed an animal technician school early and the first graduates were in 1962. I first became involved with the AVMA's committee for animal technicians' activities and training and served on that committee from its inception in 1972 to about 1976. Since 1976 I have been on the council of education and serve on that at present as chairman of non-professional assistants for veterinarians. There are several aspects we could look at. As we stand today there are probably some 9 to 10 thousand graduates of animal technician programs. Currently we have probably less than half of those employed. Historically they are young women that tend to leave the job market to get married or have babies and then tend to come back. In Canada they have 66 animal technician schools. As of April of this year, AVMA's committee, which has the responsibility for the accreditation of these schools, has accredited 37 and there were 5 more being considered at its November meeting. I really didn't get a chance to find out the outcome so we could be currently having about 42 accredited programs. Only 13 states do not have programs. I have a list of those if you are interested in the states that do not have an animal technician schools. I would like to direct your thinking to the use of veterinary assistants. The best name that seems to be involved instead of "veterinary technician" which would imply that they would maybe do things on their own would be "animal technicians." At least 26 and maybe more states have in their Practice Act regulations that would cover the use of animal technicians and would usually involve registration of animal technicians so then we would have the term "animal technician" or "registered animal technician." So really we have veterinary assistants, a graduate animal technician and then in those states that register them we would have registered animal technicians and I would like to get across the idea that very often we hear the term "licensed animal technician" and I think that really we should steer away from this because in a lot of states but not every state licensure implies that you tend to work on your own. We would not like for this to be the case with animal technicians so we would like the term "registered technicians" which implies that they work with someone. I think currently there is no state that has animal technicians working independently of veterinarians. As to what the training involves, the idea that evolved with our committee is

that in order to have an accredited program it should be at least a minimum of two years and in order to qualify it should have at least one, preferably two, veterinarians on the staff actually training the technicians.

At the time we started accreditation of animal technician schools there were a few four-year programs which we would call a four-year animal technology program. Most of these were in the area of laboratory animal medicine. It was felt that this was a little too much training for an animal technician to assist a veterinarian. So we made no attempt to accredit four-year programs except by the same guidelines that we used for the two-year program. The idea or the problem of what the animal technicians should do has got to be related to the way they are trained. Currently we feel that if a school is going to be accredited it should advertise or make available the area that it is going to work in. The majority of them have worked in the area of small animal medicine. There are some that work in the area of large animal medicine and then there are some that work in the area of laboratory animal medicine. But in order to be an AVMA Ktech accredited school, if the emphasis is on small animal medicine, students would have to be familiar with some of the large animals and have some exposure to laboratory animal medicine. Now if there was a program for laboratory animal medicine then there would have to be some exposure or some work with small animal medicine and some work with large animal medicine. One of the things that created some controversy was how the students are trained. Some schools feel that in order to train the students we should set up a clinical facility. We sure offer a clinical service to the community, and this was one of the first things we hit head on.

It is a policy that the school to be accredited should have their own animals. They should not provide clinical services for other animals or other people and historically most of them have their own animals to work with. There still is some problem with students bringing their own animals in to do work on, or neighbors want to bring animals by and it has created a little problem requiring schools to have some exposure to large animals. I wonder which is the best situation for us as bovine practitioners. Most of the schools are related to small animal medicine. But if you think about the work and if we look at what they are actually trained for, it fits perfectly with what we need if we want to use one in our clinical situation. Two-year programs consist of laboratory work and

courses in anatomy and physiology. Students spend a full two years and most of them are involved after their first year with a summer intern program. We feel the best situations are those programs that are associated with veterinary schools. Unfortunately, all states do not have veterinary schools that they could be associated with so from an animal technician's standpoint those states usually have an intern program worked out jointly with the state association. Now accreditation of these programs is a joint venture with AVMA's Ktech committee, the state association that the school is in and with the public. There are public members on the committee. Our school in North Carolina works primarily with small animals. We have some familiarization with large animals and then most of the students go into mixed practices between their first and second year for a what we call an animal technician intern program during the summer. It has to be at least 12 weeks of so many hours. It usually is with mixed practitioners during that time to get exposure with large animals. Our school has laboratory animals involved too. Now one of their required courses is laboratory diagnostic work. I think there is a perfect public relations aspect if we handle it properly, when nice young girls are indoctrinated properly for PR for veterinary medicine. It is just a beautiful thing, I think. They are taught radiology. They are not taught how to read but how to make films of good quality. They are taught anesthesia with the idea that they cannot only administer it. There is some controversy whether animal technicians should administer an anesthetic or if they should just monitor. It is very difficult when you visit these programs. How do you train students to monitor anesthesia unless they know or have some feel for administration of this? This can vary with states as to what they can do. I think more and more it comes to what are technicians trained to do? I think a very simple explanation of that is that we train students to assist veterinarians in everything except three things: we don't train them to do surgery; we don't train them to make a diagnosis; and we don't train them to prescribe drugs.

I have had practitioners tell me, "Well, I want my animal technician to dehorn and I want my animal technician to castrate." This is fine for your state. But in our state, castration and dehorning of farm animals is exempt from our Practice Act. Sure, in our practice animal technicians do this, but how about your neighboring state? I think if we stick with the training that we exclude surgery because in our neighboring state this might not be an exempt procedure and then leave it up to the practitioner on procedures he wants them to do. If he or she has the background for working with animals it is very simple to train them to do these other procedures.

Some veterinarians are asking why we don't train them to do skin suturing? Why don't we train them to do other things related to surgery? They assist us in everything under supervision except we do not train them to do surgery. We don't have them making

diagnoses and we don't have them prescribing drugs. The ideal situation for assisting in surgery is getting the animal ready for you. Currently most of these programs are granting an associate degree and then the way they are used in the state depends on your own Practice Act, your own practice law where they work as they graduate animal technicians. In our Practice Act, several years ago we included that animal technicians can assist us to do everything except diagnosis, surgery and prescribing drugs. A written exam is administered by our Board and then we grant registration to those that pass. Now, looking at what I was asked to cover, how do I use animal technicians in our practice? This was our practice situation which was a mixed practice. Two of us did the large animal practice for the last, well I have been involved for 21 years. About 4 or 5 years ago we decided to move out and build a haul-in clinic at this facility for since about 1963 when animal technicians have been available we've had employed anywhere from 2 to 5 at different times. I think now currently this practice is strictly small animal and they currently have 3 registered animal technicians in the practice. About 4 or 5 years ago I got a tiger by the tail and built a large animal haul-in clinic and so this is how we're using animal technicians in our practice.

I need to tell you a little about our practice situation. We do have a mixed practice, very little small animal. The small animal is done across the front of the building. There is an extra horse barn in the back. And then across the other end of the building is where we handle the food animal, predominately dairy cattle, some beef and some swine. Quite a few goats recently and some sheep. Most of the facility is for handling cattle. In our clinic we have currently two animal technicians. Our small animal technician also can fill in and help with large animals. I do very little small animal work. Only way I can get by today in small animal would be to have my small animal technician there. So I make sure I don't get caught on the time that somebody else slips away from the small animal part without an animal technician. This is a perfect situation for laboratory work since our small animal technician can do most of our lab procedures. We have our lab downstairs and we have our biochemistry and profile lab upstairs. The large animal technician gets more involved with this than the small animal. A technician can better handle your in-coming calls if she's familiar with farm animals so they can be used in many roles.

Our animal technicians very often get involved with taking farm calls when the other people are out for lunch or late in the afternoon when they are still there. I think all of us, or most of us at least, do some dispensing and this was the thing we had some concern about. We take the idea that for our pharmacy we can divide our drugs into about four different types, the over-the-counter is often referred to which has proper labeling. Our animal technicians can dispense these without our supervision. Someone comes by to buy something that they have been using, we

don't have to get involved with it. The animal technician can do that. For what I call veterinary prescription drugs, we have to send in the order either by phone or write down on our farm visit and they do not dispense those drugs without our consent or without our prescribing them. The other category that they are not involved with are drugs that are not veterinary-use drugs. Human drugs, and we prescribe those and they do not dispense them. Obviously they do not dispense any controlled drug so that would be the four groups. Technicians can be used for working with horses and assisting in surgery. We recheck the animal to make sure that what we are going to do is what the animal was referred in to be done. Then the animal technicians take over and get the animal ready for surgery. When we finish with surgery, the animal technicians can take over the after-care and this has been a tremendous help in the conservation of time for the veterinary general clinic. Most of our surgery on cattle of course is done standing and this area the only thing that I have to get involved is to do the surgery.

They take over the treatment and if we are going to hospitalize or keep the case in the clinic then they do the follow-up under direction. I just couldn't say

enough about how much time actually animal technicians can save you if you have a clinical situation. If we have a bull coming in for evaluation the technician gets everything set up and it takes just a small amount of time. The veterinary assistant could also do the same thing, but you are working with someone who has a lot more knowledge. We process quite a few dairy calves in the clinic in the spring and fall and our animal technician does just about all of this work now and relieves us to do other things. We deworm, trim the feet and do the vaccinations and our large animal technician does the foot trimming. He also gives the vaccinations. In North Carolina dehorning and castration are exempt, so we can use him for those surgery procedures. Then a big relief in our clinic was set up to try to fit the needs of our location. We have a lot of cattle with foot problems. And there is nothing more back-breaking than trying to do a bad foot out on the farm and so these come in to our clinic now and the majority of our large animal technicians can help. Since we do dairy work we do quite a bit of milking equipment evaluation and currently the large animal technician I've worked with for about 3 years is able to go out and evaluate milking equipment and this also has relieved me to do other things.