

Report on Proceedings Before

PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO.4 – REGIONAL NSW

INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTGAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

At Macquarie Room, Parliament House, Sydney on Wednesday 30 August 2023

Response to ‘On Notice’ Question from Ms Abigail Boyd – Dr Patricia Clarke

Question 1

Question from Ms Abigail Boyd (page 8) regarding...’what we could be getting registered veterinary nurses to do that vets are currently doing and what sort of percentage of the average vet’s work that that would relieve them from’.

Dear Ms Abigail Boyd

Registering veterinary nurses and veterinary technologists (veterinary technicians) will, as in all registered professions, raise the standards of veterinary nursing practice due to increased accountability where they are bound by a code of professional conduct and subject to a disciplinary committee if transgressions occur. Educational standards and qualifications will also be mandatory, as will continuing professional development (CPD). The current voluntary Australian Veterinary Nurse and Technician (AVNAT) Registration Scheme requires registered veterinary nurses and technicians to complete 20 CPD points annually (equivalent to 20 hours). All CPD completed must be approved by the AVNAT Regulatory Council using an approval system based on the American Association of Veterinary State Boards’ *Registry of Approved Continuing Education* (RACE) program applying uniform standards for veterinary nursing continuing education (AAVSB 2023). RACE standards for CPD which are a form of quality assurance apply to both veterinarians and veterinary nurses/technicians in the United States. We believe therefore these factors will allow the veterinarian to have more confidence in delegating tasks to the qualified, registered paraprofessional who remains up to date in their field.

The *Educators for the Veterinary Allied Health Professions in Higher Education* (Australia) (known as the ‘Educators’), have developed a document outlining skills (including advanced skills) that could be performed by graduate veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians. Ten copies were submitted at the Hearing for the Portfolio 4 Committee to peruse.

The Skills List represents the capabilities of the higher education (HE) graduate veterinary technician and veterinary nurse equipped with the knowledge, skills and attributes at the Australian Qualifications Framework Level 7—underpinned by the graduate attributes of an in-depth knowledge of their field, higher order communications skills, critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, research skills, and a capability for inclusivity and using evidence-based practice.

This Skills List has the capacity to expand the level of support for veterinarians much needed in times of a veterinarian shortage and practitioner burn-out, coupled with the demands of the increasing complexity of veterinary medicine and modes of delivery, and societal expectations.

In addition to meeting the requirements of the *VNCA Day One Competency Standards* and *Day One Skills* (copies also submitted by Gary Fitzgerald) (VNCA 2023), we believe that graduate veterinary technicians and nurses could be allowed to perform the following specified duties and procedures, that do not involve diagnosis. This list is not exhaustive. Some skills would be performed under veterinary supervision and the term, 'supervision', would need to be defined at various levels. However, being a registered professional also involves having a degree of autonomy. Therefore, their scope of practice needs to be defined.

Examples of Advanced Skills

- Administer controlled drugs (S8 classification) under veterinary supervision. (This is not allowed in any state in Australia, except Queensland and only in restricted circumstances.) Pain management for small animals using S8 drugs is a major element of surgical nursing throughout Australia.
- Dispense scheduled drugs (S4) prescribed by a veterinarian.
- Euthanase non-survival wildlife cases in consultation with a veterinarian.
 - Most veterinarians are often doing this several times per day for no remuneration. Skilled, experienced veterinary nurses/technicians perform the triage and have to wait for a vet to be available to euthanase a non-survival case, This is not in the best interests of the health and welfare of the wildlife. Plus it adds to the emotional labour/stress of the veterinarian's and veterinary nurse/technician's work day.
- Induce general anaesthesia in small animals following specified veterinary practice protocols.
- Intubate dogs in preparation for inhalation anaesthesia; extubate post surgery.
- Perform local nerve blocks as part of a pain management plan in consultation with the veterinarian.
- Perform ultrasound guided cystocentesis for emergency small animal cases
- Operate imaging modalities such as ultrasound for basic scanning procedures in small and large animals (e.g. to check for bladder rupture in emergency cases)
- Take small animal radiographs including dental radiographs without veterinary supervision (In Queensland currently veterinary nurses and technicians can hold a radiation use licence to take small animal radiographs. The veterinarian does not have to be present, only direct them to take the radiograph. This licensing is variable across Australia unfortunately. For example, in South Australia veterinary nurses/technicians are not licensed. They are in Queensland.
- Perform dental prophylaxis procedures in anaesthetised small animals. This is currently in the veterinary nursing training package (curriculum) and covered in all

bachelor degrees. It is very variable whether vets will allow their nurses/technicians to do this.

- Perform comprehensive oral Health charting of anaesthetised patient (under veterinary supervision)
- Conduct *graduate 'veterinary technician' consultations using standardised formats for:
 - Collect a thorough patient history and handover to veterinarian
 - dog and cat weight management clinics
 - geriatric health and wellness clinics
 - nutrition advice
 - bandage and dressing changes
 - **preventative health care client education– parasite control, vaccination protocols (Very important)**
 - dental checks
 - pregnancy assessment in cattle and sheep
- Provide small animal diabetic patient support, including monitoring blood glucose curves.
- Blood pressure monitoring on outpatients
- Participate in veterinary team consultations whereby the *graduate 'veterinary technician' performs:
 - the initial triage and physical examination, then transfers the patient and their data to the veterinarian.
 - post-operative checks on routine surgical cases and suture removalsThese could apply to both small and large animal cases.
- Perform minor stitch-ups, and non-body cavity minor procedures under veterinary supervision.
- Perform animal rehabilitation techniques under the guidance of a registered animal physiotherapist.
- Perform urinary catheterisation of a male dog.

Large Animals

A graduate large animal technician could be trained to:

- Effectively auscultate heart/lungs (horse, cow, goat) to a graduate standard
- Trim hooves (ruminant, horse)
- Apply equine tail and leg wraps
- Collect milk samples and conduct mastitis testing (e.g., CMT, bacterial culture)
- Administer dry cow therapy including the application of intramammary medications under veterinary supervision
- Perform nasogastric intubation in cow and horse (adults and neonates) under veterinary supervision (routine husbandry technique)
- Perform pregnancy testing/scanning
- Perform metricheking (identifies cows with endometritis)
- Perform AI in cattle

- Demonstrate knowledge of and perform dehorning & disbudding (cows, goats) including nerve blocks under veterinary supervision (NOTE: There is a UQ graduate veterinary technician performing these procedures in New Zealand currently.)
- Syringe dose (ruminants, horse)
- Float teeth (horse) under veterinary supervision
- Collect blood from cattle (You don't have to be a veterinarian to do this.)

Additional skills

- Perform statistical analysis on data sets and define and use basic epidemiological concepts to assess contemporary problems within the animal industries.
- Collect, prepare and evaluate ear cytology.
- Provide intensive nursing care for severely compromised toxicity patients (e.g. snake envenomation).
- Maintain and operate a ventilator (e.g. tick paralysis cases in small animals requiring ventilatory support).
- Maintain chest and tracheostomy tubes.
- Perform blood typing for small animals.
- Perform blood crossmatching in preparation for small animal blood transfusions
- Place arterial catheters.
- Set up ECG for small animal ECG trace and identify abnormal ECG traces (e.g. VPCs , atrial fibrillation) and monitor patient with abnormalities.
- Maintain patient drains (wounds, thoracostomy, abdominal – active/suction and passive)

Conclusion

There are a broad and extensive range of skills that could be delegated to graduate veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians. It would be difficult to accurately estimate without appropriate data what percentage of the veterinarian's workload could be relieved by a veterinary nurse or veterinary technician. We could speculate that it would be substantial. There are published data from the United States and Canada that demonstrates the benefit of a higher veterinary technician to veterinarian ratio. An Ontario Veterinary Medical Association study showed that clinics with higher non-veterinarian to veterinarian ratios (from 2.9 to 4.2 per Full-Time Equivalent veterinarian) function more effectively and have a higher net practice income (Osborne & Richardson 2006). A more recent study found a \$78,118 increase in revenue for every additional technician per veterinarian (Shock, Roche, Genore & Renaud 2020).

Additionally, we could look at successful models in other professions, for example nurse practitioners in human nursing. Similarly, models used in dentistry where oral health therapists and dental hygienists work in an integrated dental care system to increase access to dental care could also be replicated (Dentistry 2023). The veterinary profession needs to modernise and innovate in this time of a veterinarian workforce shortage.

The Educators therefore advocate for an Advanced Veterinary Nurse role (mid-tier veterinary professional/veterinary nurse practitioner) to utilise the capabilities, knowledge and skills of bachelor's degree qualified veterinary technicians and veterinary nurses more fully and alleviate the veterinarian's workload. As well as the skills listed in this document (which are not exhaustive) advanced level veterinary nurses could triage onsite or be employed in a telehealth capacity to provide care under veterinary direction. Anecdotally, there are specialist veterinary practices that are maximally utilising their veterinary nurses and technicians and the concept of a 'nurse practitioner' is starting to appear in discussions. Often specialist practices will lead the way in staff utilisation and training.

In terms of increasing the veterinary workforce numbers, it takes only three years to educate and train a bachelor's degree veterinary paraprofessional compared to a minimum of five years for a Bachelor of Veterinary Science (e.g. The University of Queensland) or six years for a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree (The University of Adelaide). In fact, a significant number of those entering the highly competitive veterinary science programs have already completed another degree, or at least one year of a university degree, to upgrade their score to become eligible for entry. Hence, it is more cost-effective and a faster process to graduate more veterinary paraprofessionals in this time of veterinarian shortages. You would also be aware of Southern Cross University's (Northern NSW) proposal to launch a Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing degree.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information 'on notice'.

Yours sincerely

Trish Clarke, on behalf of *Educators for the Veterinary Allied Health Professions in Higher Education* (Australia)

Dr Patricia Clarke BVSc (Hons IIA) PhD Grad Dip Ed

References

- American Veterinary State Boards 2023, *AAVSB RACE provider information*, AAVSB, Kansas, USA, viewed 28 September 2023, < <https://aavsb.org/ce-services/race/program-overview>>.
- Osborne D & Richardson F 2006, 'Non-DVM staff: Doing more with more', *The Canadian Veterinary Journal*, vol. 47, no. 11, pp. 1125-27.
- Shock, DA, Roche, SM, Genore, R & Renaud, DL 2020, 'The economic impact that registered veterinary technicians have on Ontario veterinary practices', *Canadian Veterinary Journal*, vol. 61, pp. 505-11.
- Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia 2023, *VNCA Day One Competency Standards*, VNCA, Melbourne, viewed 25 September 2023, <https://www.vnca.asn.au/vnca-day-one-competency-standards/#:~:text=The%20VNCA%20Day%20One%20Competency%20Standards%20have%20been,to%20recording%20competence%20achievement%20at%20the%20highest%20level>.

The Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage in NSW

Portfolio Committee 4 – Regional NSW inquire into and report on the veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales, and in particular: the shortage of veterinarians across the profession, including clinical (small and large animal practice), government, academia, research, industry, and pathology

Submission by:

Educators for the Allied Veterinary Health Professions in Higher Education (Australia)

29 September 2023

‘On Notice Response’ to The Honourable Greg Donnelly’s Question regarding the Australian Veterinary Association’s Submission

This 'On Notice' response has been prepared by the *Educators for the Allied Veterinary Health Professions in Higher Education (Australia)*.

For further information regarding this submission, please contact:
Dr Patricia Clarke BVSc (Hons IIA), PhD, Grad Dip Ed

Professor Paul Mills

Dear The Honourable Greg Donnelly

Please find below the response of the *Educators for the Veterinary Allied Health Professions in Higher Education (Australia)* regarding the Australian Veterinary Association's submission to the NSW Government's Inquiry into the Veterinary Workforce Shortage.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional information 'on notice'.

Yours sincerely

Trish Clarke, on behalf of *Educators for the Veterinary Allied Health Professions in Higher Education (Australia)*

Dr Patricia Clarke BVSc (Hons IIA) PhD Grad Dip Ed

Australian Veterinary Association's Recommendations to the Inquiry

The 'Educators' support the AVA's long term outcomes as listed below.

The AVA is calling upon the NSW Government to:

- provide funding to resource the development of prioritisation and planning of the longer-term strategies that will have the most effective outcomes for all stakeholders the veterinary profession serves and the profession itself.
- conduct legislative and regulatory reforms to safeguard the role of the veterinary profession in the delivery of animal health and welfare, whilst making it adaptable to a constantly changing environment.
- through funding encourage animal related industries and the veterinary profession to collaborate and develop a framework/solution that will improve integration of veterinary services into animal production systems that is workable for all parties.
- explore solutions that support the veterinary sector in its role with stray animals, addressing the key issues outlined and promoting overall animal health, welfare, and public health.
- commits funding to develop and implement a framework that provides regulatory and appropriate financial support to the provision of veterinary services for lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations provided by all sectors of the profession (charities and the private veterinary sector).
- provide resources to fund a think tank to develop an afterhours model that is sustainable for the profession and allows veterinary services to be delivered to the NSW community in both urban and rural areas 24/7.

The ‘Educators’ support the AVA’s short term strategies to allow time for development and implementation of long-term strategies.

The AVA is calling upon the NSW Government to:

- commit to ongoing recognition and support of veterinarians to continue to build and maintain capacity for EAD surveillance and response activities.
- consider funding for the profession to provide Work Integrated Learning (WIL) opportunities for individuals wishing to work in NSW as well as funding to assist NSW applicants undertake the examination process without financial hardship.
- considers funding around educational fee relief to encourage early career veterinarians to work in rural NSW.
- include veterinarians in existing mechanisms to sustain medical and paramedical workers in rural areas of NSW.
- commit funding to AVA’s wellness initiative, THRIVE to support veterinarians and veterinary staff **(including veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians)** to lead satisfying, prosperous and healthy careers.
- consider funding a public awareness campaign to address the rising rates of verbal and physical assault of veterinary teams and to educate the community on the impact of their actions. For example, similar to the NSW Ambulance ‘Its Never Okay’ campaign.

a) The shortage of veterinarians across the profession, including clinical (small and large animal practice), government, academia, research, industry, and pathology

The ‘Educators’ support the AVA’s response to this Term of Reference.

b) The challenges in maintaining a sustainable veterinary workforce, including recruitment and retention rates

The ‘Educators’ support the AVA’s response to this Term of Reference.

c) The burn-out and mental health challenges facing the veterinary profession

The ‘Educators’ support the AVA’s response to this Term of Reference. Veterinary nurses and technicians suffer similar effects of burnout and stress. The AVA Thrive project is also aimed at supporting them although not specifically indicated in their submission. There is Veterinary Nurse and Technician representation on the Steering Committee for this project.

d) The role of, and challenges affecting, veterinary nurses

There are many synergies between AVA’s submission and the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia’s (VNCA) and the ‘Educators’ submission to the Inquiry. The ‘Educators’ and the VNCA also strongly support the Australian Veterinary Nurse and Technician’s registration Scheme

(AVNAT) as a model for mandatory registration of veterinary nurses and technicians. On their website the AVA policy on Veterinary Nursing also endorse this Scheme (AVA 2020). <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/accreditation-and-employment-of-veterinarians/veterinary-nursing/>

The 'Educators' direct you to their submission for additional strategies suggested by our group.

e) The role of, and challenges affecting, overseas trained veterinarians

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

f) The arrangements and impacts of providing after-hour veterinary services

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

g) The impact of the current legislative and regulatory framework on veterinarians

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

h) The particular challenges facing the veterinary profession and the shortage of veterinarians in regional, rural and remote New South Wales

i) The role played by veterinarians in providing care to lost, stray and homeless animals, injured wildlife and during emergency situations

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

j) The impact of the current veterinary shortage on animal welfare, including the impact on the economy, members of the public seeking veterinary care for animals, pounds and shelters, the animal agribusiness industry, companion animal breeders and others

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

k) Current barriers to accessing veterinary care for members of the public, particularly those with lower incomes or who live in regional, rural and remote locations

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

l) Strategies to support the current veterinary workforce, as well as ways to increase the number of practicing veterinarians particularly in regional, rural and remote New South Wales

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.

m) Strategies to improve access to veterinary care

The 'Educators' support the AVA's response to this Term of Reference.