

Submission
No 183

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Name suppressed

Date Received: 21 July 2023

Partially
Confidential

I am writing to you as a veterinary nurse who has worked in the industry for 20 years. In this time I have had extensive experience in all areas of veterinary nursing including reception, medical and surgical nursing. I can do everything from take a client enquiry via phone or email, to taking blood, running laboratory tests, taking radiographs, inducing and monitoring anaesthesia, nurse triage, restraint of a large range of species (not just cats and dogs), nursing critical patients, and more.

In the human medical field, it would take many nurses in different departments to do the equivalent jobs.

Each year I watch more and more of my coworkers (both veterinarians and veterinary nurses) leave the industry due mainly to burn out and mental health issues.

Much of this has to do with issues arising from working long hours, financial stress, lack of recognition, and constant abuse and emotional manipulation from clients.

As a veterinary nurse we are often expected to work 10 or 12 hour days, including weekends and public holidays. Often staffing issues means workplaces frown upon, or do not approve, more than 2 weeks of annual leave at any one time.

Remuneration for our skill level is poor. I could be making more working in hospitality, or driving a truck, or any number of jobs that do not put pets lives in my hands. Many of the coworkers that I have seen leave usually end up taking entry level job opportunities outside of the industry, which offer better work / life balance and usually for much greater pay.

The veterinary industry gets little recognition for the important job it plays. During Covid-19, we were considered essential workers. Yet while other industries such as health care, grocery store workers, and even garbage collectors were publicly thanked for their service, not once did I ever see our industry even mentioned.

Currently "veterinary nurse" or "veterinary technician" is not considered as a title in Australia, so we are lumped under the "retail workers" tag and paid as such.

As more and more experienced staff leave the industry, they are being replaced with inexperienced nurses, which only places more pressure on already overworked senior staff.

Client abuse and emotional manipulation has also become an exponentially worsening issue as the years have gone on. Pets are now often seen as members of the family and expected to be treated as such. The difficulty arises when services need to be paid for. There is no Medicare for pets and the majority of owners do not have pet insurance. Veterinary staff often take the brunt of frustration of owners who care deeply for their pets when they are faced with difficult decisions based on finances. The veterinary staff shortage compounds the situation, as pet owners often have difficulty in getting appointments as many clinics are already at (or over) capacity.

All of the above issues, as well as the emotional toll that our job takes, contributes to generally poor mental health in our industry.

It is obvious that something needs to change in order to keep staff able to happily function in our industry, especially long term. I hope that this enquiry can help a drowning industry.