

OPINION

The Great Debate: Technician or Nurse? Should Veterinary Technicians be Nurses (as They Are in Other Countries)?

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In the U.S., we have been called Veterinary Technicians since the early '80s, but there is now a push to call us Veterinary "Nurses" as they do in other countries, including the United Kingdom.

I think we should stick with Veterinary Technician.

To change things and to start calling us "nurses" now would definitely be a difficult task and cause a lot of disruption in our profession, as well as confuse us with human nurses (who, as I understand it, have a trademark on the word "nurse").

To me, the bigger point is not about what we call ourselves, but how we represent ourselves. It is about education – educating the general public about who we are and the veterinary community about our expertise and passion.

Let's compare Veterinary Technicians to other similar professions. Are we similar to teachers, nurses, dietitians, dental hygienists or counselors?

The answer, of course, is that we are a combination of all of the above. Think about all the different aspects of our jobs. We wear so many hats every day – one minute we could be the radiology tech, then the pharmacy tech, then the surgery tech, then the dental hygienist. In the examination room, we take care of much more than a patient. Yes, we are the patient advocate and caregiver, but we are also the client educator, the communicator, counselor and advocate. We do so much more than taking histories, keeping records, giving injections and taking blood. We are usually with the client and the patient from the time they arrive at the practice until they leave.

Plus, how many species do we learn about, know about and work with? Those with paws, wings, hooves, flippers and no feet at all – not just two-legged animals.

What do nurses do in their day and who do they work on? With their limited responsibilities

and only one kind of patient – hmm, for me, it's an easy choice which I would prefer to be.

Back to my bigger point. As the Veterinary Technician profession grows and Veterinarians come to rely on us more and more, the world is at our fingertips. We are the heart of the veterinary team and the keeper of the human-animal bond. It is our job to ensure everyone knows that and to fight for recognition and our reputation. It is also our responsibility to improve ourselves every day, which in turn will promote our profession.

As Veterinary Technicians, we are so much more than nurses. I say, stop worrying about what we are called. We know we have the best job in the world and take care of the best, most grateful patients. No matter what we call ourselves – Veterinary Technician or Veterinary Nurse – the important thing is to be proud and passionate about our profession.

And call me a Veterinary Technician. ■

(Melissa Supernor is President of the Massachusetts Veterinary Technician Association; Board member of the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America; Secretary and Chair of the State Representative Committee; and Board member and Treasurer of the Academy of Internal Medicine Veterinary Technicians. She works for the VCA Westboro Animal Hospital in Massachusetts.)



Cartoons courtesy of Adam Lanier

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