

TENNESSEE FARM BUREAU FEDERATION

2018 Policy Development



Veterinary Technician or Veterinary Nurse

Issue

In 2018, legislation was filed in Tennessee to change the name of the profession traditionally known as “Veterinary Technician” to “Veterinary Nurse.” The measure did not pass but is expected to come up again in the future. Proponents of the change believe the change better acknowledges the true nature of the job requirements. Similarly, proponents believe this would attract more people into an industry with a growing need for these professionals. The bill established minimum education requirements to earn the title Veterinary Nurse. The opponents of the name change were medical nurse associations. Their main concern was if another industry used the name “nurse,” it would diminish the standing of the medical nurse profession. Additionally, the term “nurse” is currently only used in the human medical profession in the United States.

Background

The National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA) has started the “Veterinary Nurse Initiative” which aims to establish a single and standard title to a profession historically known as veterinary technicians and change the name to veterinary nurse. The initiative also includes establishing a national standard of credentialing for veterinary technicians/nurses. Began in 2016, the initiative has a proposed timeline of 5 to 10 years to enact law changes in all 50 states to match the effort. The main objective is for each state to have the same credential procedures and education requirements in order to attain the title veterinary nurse. Currently, there are varying credentialing requirements in each state, with some having no procedure at all. The belief is the initiative, if successful, will elevate the understanding of roles and responsibilities of veterinary technicians/nurses.

Tennessee currently has a licensing procedure for veterinary medical technicians. The license requirements are:

- An application submitted to and approved by the Tennessee Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners
- Graduate from a veterinary technology program approved by the American Veterinary Medical Association
- Pass an examination
- Provide proof of good moral character, which is determined by the Tennessee Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners
- Pay applicable fees

This initiative came to Tennessee in 2018 with the filing of SB2154/HB2288. The legislation would have renamed veterinary technicians to veterinary nurses in the state. The bill also required a new rule making process for the establishment of the licensing procedure for veterinary nurses. HB2288 passed the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee but was taken off notice in the House Government Operations committee after the bill was assigned to the General Subcommittee of the Senate Energy, Agriculture, and Natural Resources committee; effectively killing the bill for the General Assembly. Proponents promise to bring similar legislation in future legislative sessions.

The main opponents of SB2154/HB2288 were medical nursing associations who strongly opposed the bill. According to the Tennessee Nurses Association:

- The title registered nurse has always been linked to the provision of care to humans.
- The Registered Veterinary Nurse initiative would undermine the title “Nurse.”
- There should be transparency of those who provide care for human beings and those who care for other forms of life and the title nurse should remain distinctive.

At this point, Farm Bureau is not aware of any state that has passed similar legislation to change the name from veterinary technician to veterinary nurse.

Questions

1. Does your community lack veterinary services for large animals?
2. Does changing the name from technician to nurse raise the status of the profession?
3. Would more young people be willing to go into veterinary medicine with the title of veterinary nurse, rather than technician?
4. By using the name “nurse” does it diminish the title for human medical nurses?
5. Should veterinary technicians be called technicians or nurses?
6. Should TFBF take a position on the name change?
7. TFBF Policy does not address veterinary technicians at all, should it? If so, how?

Farm Bureau Policy

Veterinary Services (Partial)

Veterinarians specializing in large animal practices are an economic necessity for a strong livestock sector for Tennessee agriculture. To ensure the profitability of a livestock operation, farmers need strong, healthy animals. Large animal veterinarians help livestock producers stay abreast of and have access to the latest technology available in large animal care. We encourage the University of Tennessee School of Veterinary Medicine to emphasize the need of large animal practitioners to both current and potential vet students. We encourage the development of a four-year undergraduate veterinary practitioner degree at the University of Tennessee. This program would be a joint effort of the College of Agriculture Animal Science Department and the College of Veterinary Medicine. Veterinary practitioners would work under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian. Laws and regulations pertaining to veterinary practices should not discourage or inhibit large animal practices.

A distinguishing definition of acceptable livestock management practices as opposed to veterinary medical practices is needed to avoid unnecessary conflict between the veterinary community and the farm community. We need and depend on one another. Everyone wins if responsible, proper, safe, cost efficient, animal care is made the top priority. We encourage the Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association (TVMA) to caution large animal veterinarians about the impact of increasing drug costs on the producer and the veterinary practice.