REGULATION OF ALLIED VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS WITHIN NEW ZEALAND

You may be aware of discussions taking place within our profession about the voluntary registration of veterinary nurses, veterinary technologists and rural animal technicians as well as our proposal for regulation of all allied veterinary professionals. On behalf of the New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA), we wanted to take the opportunity to personally engage you on the process and to update you on the status of our efforts to date.

Background
Allied veterinary professionals (AVPs) include all persons working in a clinical capacity to provide animal healthcare under the direction of a veterinarian. This includes veterinary nurses, veterinary technologists, rural animal technicians, large animal veterinary technicians, and veterinary nursing assistants. These healthcare practitioners form an essential part of the animal healthcare team and as with other healthcare-related professions, regulation is an important part of maintaining quality, safety, and wellbeing of the profession as a whole.

Vision
The goal of regulation for AVPs is to promote professionalism of the allied veterinary professional community by setting and enforcing consistent standards for those who can enter the profession and for their continued practice.

Regulation also creates a much-needed framework going forward to keep up with recognized international standards of practice; to protect our primary industries; and to ensure New Zealand complies with its OIE obligations to regulate AVPs. As it stands now, there are no functional controls in place to protect against risks arising from unqualified, poorly trained or incompetent AVPs.

Value/Benefits
There are numerous benefits to professional regulation for AVPs, including:

- Consistency of education;
- Maintenance of competency to practice and ensuring professional currency;
- Accountability for our own professional practice and conduct;
- Better protection of animal health and welfare;
- Alignment with international standards and protection of primary industry;
- Safeguarding the public interest.

Status to date
In the past fifteen months, the NZVNA has appointed a special committee tasked with initiating the move toward professional regulation. The committee has been given an interim title of Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council (AVPRC). So far, this council has appointed an Educational Standards Committee (taking the place of the former ANTECH Committee) and a Professional Standards Committee. We are currently striving for close collaboration and representation of all AVP groups, and the wider veterinary community in order to be inclusive and supportive of all personnel working within in a clinical capacity to provide animal healthcare.
Last August, a voluntary Register and List was established to begin building the framework needed to log formal qualifications, fitness to practice, clinical currency, and professional conduct for AVPs. The intention is that regulation eventually include all persons working in a clinical capacity to provide animal healthcare under the direction of a veterinarian.

Thus far, the voluntary Register/List has been generally accepted by qualified veterinary nurses, veterinary technologists, rural animal technicians, and veterinary nursing assistants but all allied veterinary professionals are invited to participate. A badge has also been created which can be worn by those who are Registered/Listed to help identify them in a clinical setting. The uptake onto the voluntary Register and List has been noteworthy with more than 250 veterinary technologists, diploma veterinary nurses, certificate veterinary nurses, and rural animal technicians joining within a 4 month period at the end of 2015. We anticipate even greater uptake for 2016 including the addition of the new veterinary nursing assistants that will be graduating this year. More information on the Register/List can be found at the following weblink: www.nzvna.org.nz/regulation

Both VCNZ and NZVA have given their full support to the AVPRC. VCNZ has also invited the Chair of the AVPRC, Jennifer Hamlin, to participate in VCNZ meetings going forward in order to support collaboration between all veterinary professionals and allied professionals as well as to assist in the establishment of the infrastructure needed for formal regulation.

Future Focus
Professional regulation is a long-term vision ultimately requiring legislative change supported by the veterinary industry and its stakeholders. Looking ahead, and until statutory regulation is achieved, the AVPRC will be governed as a working group of NZVNA. We foresee the regulatory body for allied veterinary professionals will function in a manner similar to the VCNZ, and ultimately under a combined umbrella with VCNZ to ensure collaboration and coherence of all professionals working within the veterinary industry.

During this process, we encourage feedback from allied veterinary professionals, educational providers, veterinarians, and practice owners on the process and welcome support from all areas of industry. We will be posting redacted updates on the NZVNA website as they become available and we will be providing a means for receiving stakeholder feedback during this process.

NZVNA and AVPRC will be in attendance at the NZVA conference in June, positioned alongside the VCNZ stand. We welcome you to visit and have a chat about these new developments.

For any further inquiries or to provide feedback, please contact: regulation@nzvna.org.nz

Best regards,

Jennifer Hamlin
Chair, Allied Veterinary Professional Regulatory Council (AVPRC)

Julie Hutt
President, New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA)