



## VETERINARY NURSES DO IT ALL— and Their Title Should Reflect That

This isn't your typical *Journal* article; it's more like a thank you card. And an explanation for why, before just about any talk I give at a veterinary meeting, I say "thank you" to veterinary technologists (Soon, I hope, to be called veterinary nurses).

Without your willingness to be overworked and underpaid, the paradigm of what veterinary visits are today would not and could not exist.

Can you imagine a clinic serving pet parents and caring for pets without you? Veterinarians—however well-meaning and talented—could never do it all. Even the most brilliant veterinarians have only two arms and two hands.

I'm not going to bother listing the many things that wouldn't (and couldn't) happen without you. Such a list would take up an entire column. From assisting with vaccines and wellness exams to assisting with surgeries and dental procedures—including monitoring of anesthesia; from caring for hospitalized pets to offering advice and lending a caring ear to pet parents on topics ranging from house-training puppies to pet loss. You do it all.

For another story I was working on, I was looking up those polls that describe the most admired professions. In most of those polls there's no option for selecting veterinary technicians; when taking the poll, you can only choose among the professions listed. And when a poll asking about most trusted

professions is open-ended—and the person taking the poll fills in the answer, I suggest you are taken a bit for granted. I believe most pet parents aren't aware of the diversity of what you do.

All of these are reasons why I support the more descriptive title change to veterinary nurse. Veterinary technologist almost sounds like you're an IT person, or someone who does technical sorts of things—like looking at blood work under a microscope, oh but you can do that too!

There's been increased attention paid to mental health issues regarding veterinarians, and I am glad attention is being focused on that issue. But how about technician/nurses? I argue the job pressures are similar and for less pay.

Imagine clients paying, say 20 percent more, for services. To merit commensurate pay with workload and talent, I suggest the number may be more than 20 percent, but let's just say all certified technicians receive 20 percent more in take home pay. Nearly all of that would come from client service prices, which then increase around 20 percent overnight.

So, here's a peek into a crystal ball if that were to really happen:

Today, as it is, too many clinics have experienced a decline in visits. Some clients will at times (for some clients all the time) complain about costs. I argue that today veterinary care is the best bargain in health care, and perhaps some costs are too low. Not all clients see it that way. And some clients legitimately can barely scrape the money together to pay for a dental procedure, for example. So, the pet doesn't receive needed dental care.



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It's one thing to raise the costs slightly, but if all vet fees go up overnight around 20 percent, consider the impact. Some clients who might barely manage \$5,000 for a needed procedure, may not be able to afford \$6,000 for the same procedure. But moreover, it's the cumulative impact, if everything is more money, likely checkups or preventive care visits would steeply decline (they're already in decline at many clinics for various reasons). I suggest that a steep decline in preventive care would indeed happen, extrapolating data from the Bayer Veterinary Care Usage Care studies and others.

When preventive care further declines, pets' health suffers. Even the best veterinarians can't diagnose pets they don't see. "Dr. Google" will become an even more frequent go-to for veterinary advice, as well as the local groomer and even the high school dude working at the local pet superstore. As a result, some veterinary practices could even be forced to shut down, particularly in already under-served or depressed economic areas.

With a cost jump of around 20 percent, economic euthanasias rise. Some three pet families will become one or two pet families. And many perspective pet parents simply won't feel that they can afford a pet at all; therefore adoptions and rescues will suffer. And so will animal shelters and rescues, which already operate on limited budgets.

For example, shelter dogs with heartworm are increasingly being treated. But if that declines, those wonderful dogs may be euthanized.

Remember the film *It's a Wonderful Life*? With Jimmy Stewart's character, George Bailey, positively impacting so many lives. I'm unsure that the analogy is perfect, but clearly without the willingness of veterinary technologists doing what you do, and without fanfare, every single day—the impact would be considerable.

There are some things that I do believe can be done—to at least supplement your wages just a bit, and simultaneously increase pet retention and bond pet parents to practices, which I will write about in future columns.

The shift to a more appropriate job title may help pet parents to better understand just how integral you are to their pets.

And, incidentally, meanwhile from my heart, thank you. 



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## ABOUT STEVE DALE

Steve Dale, CABC, has been a member of the Winn Feline Foundation Board of Directors for thirteen years. Steve is a founding member of the CATalyst Council, and serves on the Board of Directors of the Human Animal Bond Association. He's a contributor to several books including "The Cat: Clinical Medicine and Management," edited by Dr. Susan Little; and "Treatment and Care of the Veterinary Geriatric Patient," edited by Dr. Mary Gardner and Dr. Dani McVety; and he edited "Decoding Your Dog," authored by members of the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists. Steve is the host of three radio talk shows, and he speaks at veterinary and animal welfare conferences around the world. His website is [www.stevedale.tv](http://www.stevedale.tv).

