

REGISTERED VETERINARY TECHNOLOGISTS WHAT WE ARE AND WHY IT MATTERS PART 1

BY AMBER GREGG, RVT

If I told you that I had an appointment with an RMT, dental hygienist, LPN, or RN, you would likely know exactly what I meant. You would also have an idea of what kind of education and training they had completed in order to use that title, giving you confidence that you would be treated by a professional.

The term RVT is less widely recognized and typically requires some kind of explanation. Many RVTs say, “I’m like a nurse, but for animals.” While this helps the public conceive of how an RVT’s role relates to the veterinary team, it is not appropriate for a number of reasons. For example, in British Columbia, the term “nurse” has title protection and is used solely in the context of human medicine. So, while it may be easy to refer to an RVT as a veterinary nurse, that would run afoul of the regulatory body for nurses and would likely result in a complaint.

The Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians describes RVTs as veterinary care providers who participate in clinical decision making alongside veterinarians. The OAVT offers an excellent description of the tasks RVTs are qualified to perform and the ways they differ from the work of other members of veterinary team. However, this does not help to clarify the role of RVTs in day-to-day conversation with the public.

The use of different titles from one jurisdiction to another further complicates the issue. For example, in the United States, the titles include registered veterinary technologist (RVT), certified veterinary technician (CVT), and licensed veterinary technician (LVT). Although professionals using these titles perform similar duties, levels of qualification and regulation vary depending on the state.

In Canada there are only two designations—registered veterinary technician and registered veterinary technologist. In BC, we use the term registered veterinary technologist; we’ll discuss the

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distinction between technicians and technologists in part 2 of this article, appearing in the next issue. In most provinces, these professions are regulated, which means they are internally governed by a professional college, similar to the College of Veterinarians of BC.

In BC, RVTs are not yet internally regulated by a professional college. However, the title Registered Veterinary Technologist is protected under the Societies Act. That means that anyone using the title must be a member of the BC Veterinary Technologists Association, which can only happen if they meet the BCVTA’s stringent eligibility requirements.

Ultimately, it is important for veterinarians, veterinary staff, and RVTs themselves to use the title Registered Veterinary Technologist appropriately. Saying that RVTs are “like” another profession, describing RVTs as techs, vet techs, or technicians, or referring to all members of the veterinary support team as RVTs can only confuse clients—and in some cases staff—who do not fully understand what an RVT is and does. And it is vital to professional transparency and public safety that this term is broadly and clearly understood.

An important goal of the BCVTA is to educate the public and members of the veterinary community to use the title RVT correctly so that when someone hears it, they immediately know that the individual in question:

- Has attended an accredited program of training for veterinary technologists.
- Has completed a national licensing exam demonstrating their familiarity with the required knowledge and skills.
- Continues to undertake annual education and training to ensure their skills and knowledge remain current.

Public recognition and understanding of the RVT title are high on the list of priorities for the BCVTA. We will continue to attend public outreach events and create public awareness campaigns to encourage the public to ask for RVTs and not one of the many current variations of the title. Knowing that an RVT administers anesthesia, provides nursing care, takes radiographs, and more may help owners understand the breadth of RVT experience, knowledge, and ability to assist veterinarians, while providing excellent care for their animals. [WCV](#)



Amber Gregg, RVT, is the executive director and past president of the BCVTA. She graduated from the Thompson Rivers University veterinary technology program in 2007 and spent eight years in mixed animal practice before gaining experience in not-for-profit management. She joined the BCVTA board of directors as vice president in 2020 and served a one-year term as president in 2021 before being appointed to the executive director position in 2022. Amber is grateful for everyone who made the BCVTA the strong and healthy organization it is today, and she is proud to work with the board of directors and members of the BCVTA to continue to advance the veterinary technology profession.