

There is currently a renewed campaign to give legal protection to the title of veterinary nurses. Currently, there is no legal protection for the title which means anyone can call themselves a veterinary nurse without having studied towards a recognised qualification. In the UK, an RVN (Registered Veterinary Nurse) has completed up to four years of study, with hundreds of hours of practical training and experience, and passed exams meeting the RCVS 'Day One Competences' requirements for veterinary nurses.

I can't claim to be a vet by just walking in off the street and giving a dog an injection. I studied for five years, spending my holidays from university gaining experience in practice and in other places. I passed exams to prove I could meet the RCVS 'Day One Competences' requirements. I comply with annual CPD requirements and pay fees to remain on the RCVS register. Therefore, legally I can call myself a veterinary surgeon, however, someone who hasn't done all of that cannot. This is currently not the case for vet nurses, but it should be.

Don't get me wrong, I have known and worked with a few unqualified nurses who were very good at their jobs and had good skills. However, there's no way for them to have clinical governance, nor take responsibility for decision making or any mistakes they may make. RVNs do have this responsibility, and they have the knowledge underpinning the more practical skills they have learned. They have become professionals with the responsibility that goes with it.

Currently there is a review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act ongoing, the law that dictates who can do what when it comes to veterinary practice. Nurses do more than just clean and cuddle puppies. RVNs can carry out blood testing, administer medication, care for inpatients, monitor anaesthetics, assist in surgery, and even perform dental cleanings, radiography (x-rays) and minor surgical procedures. They can take blood samples, place IV catheters, perform nursing consultations and clinics and aid in management of long-term health conditions.

The veterinary nursing profession is relatively new, especially compared to veterinary surgeons. There is a general lack of understanding in the public of what vet nurses are and what they can do. Giving their title protection gives them that credibility to be able to proudly say that they are professionals who are skilled, knowledgeable and capable of caring for patients and clients. If they are recognised in that way, then it will pave the way for better public understanding of the veterinary nursing profession, which will allow for vet nurses to be able to use all their skills and progress their careers. Being a veterinary nurse is a career, there are options for further qualifications and specialisations, just like vets have.

I've been a clinical coach for a few years. I have stopped now, and passed the torch to some of my former nursing students who have grown into fantastic RVNs who are a credit to their profession and to the practice we work in. I still help with teaching, and I am always happy to do so. I am proud of them and so happy to see

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them flourishing in their roles. I don't know where I would be without them. I can assure you that most small animal vet practices would fall apart without a team of nurses keeping it all together.

I am therefore throwing my support behind the current campaign of the BVA ([British Veterinary Association](#)) and the BVNA ([British Veterinary Nurses Association](#)) to get the government to consider updating the law to protect the title. The RCVS ([Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons](#)) have also recommended this to the government. There will be a public survey, and there is also currently a survey within the veterinary profession. For more information, please see the [BVNA](#) page on the subject.

Veterinary nurses work hard, they are the oil that keeps a veterinary practice working. Be kind to your nurses. Get the phrase 'just a nurse' out of your vocabulary. Don't assume that most veterinary nurses are in this career because they couldn't get into vet school, as that is extremely rarely the case. Tasty snacks never go amiss either!

Comment below if you know an awesome RVN, if you are an awesome RVN or if you have any questions.

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