

# Duties and Responsibilities of the AVMA Advisory Board on Veterinary Specialties

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One of the duties of the Advisory Board for Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) is to promote the awareness of specialties in the veterinary profession to the public. Much of the first part of the presentation is taken from a draft or paper prepared by Drs. Jack Fessler of the ACVS and Jim Burt of the ACVR for use by the ABVS to provide information about specialization in the profession.

## Historical

Specialization in veterinary medicine surfaced in 1950 when the AVMA Executive Board received applications for recognition of the first two specialty organizations--the American College of Veterinary Pathologists (February 10, 1950) and the American Board of Veterinary Public Health (July 31, 1950). In 1951, the AVMA House of Delegates approved the recognition of ACVP and ABVPH and assigned the responsibility for future applications to the Council on Education. In 1957, the AVMA House of Delegates granted recognition to the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine.

The Council on Education subsequently recommended the establishment of the Advisory Board on Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) in 1959. It met for the first time in 1960 and has been guiding

the development and approval of the various Colleges and Boards ever since. The ABVS meets annually in March and is comprised of delegates from each of the AVMA recognized specialty organizations and a representative from the Council on Education. An Executive Committee of the Advisory Board was established about four years ago because of increased activity. It meets in December. The ABVS is for the expressed purposes of: 1) furnishing advice and assistance to organizations submitting petitions for establishment and recognition as a specialty, 2) evaluating and establishing criteria for specialty boards and determining that they fill a recognized need and represent distinct specialization in veterinary medicine, and 3) promoting and encouraging the enhanced utilization and availability of specialty services within the profession and to the public. In carrying out these objectives, the ABVS reviews applications and reports, makes recommendations to the Council on Education (which must be ratified by the House of Delegates), and serves as a mediator in disputes. In the past 30 years, the ABVS has been busy! It has grown from an initial committee of three to the present size of 18 members as represented by the currently approved Colleges and Boards.

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Approved AVMA Colleges and Boards	Full Approval	Membership
American Board of Veterinary Practitioners	1985	225
Certification in Companion Animals		
Certification in Equine		
Certification in Food Animals		
American Board of Veterinary Toxicology	1970	61
American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine	1957	357
American College of Theriogenologists	1975	203
American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists	1981	72
American College of Veterinary Dermatology	1986	43

American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine	1980	427
Certification in Cardiology	1980	
Certification in Neurology	1980	
Certification in Oncology	1988	
American College of Veterinary Microbiologists	1968	161
Certification in Virology	1988	
Certification in Immunology	1988	
Certification in Bacteriology/Mycology	1988	
American College of Veterinary Nutrition	1988*	18
American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists	1974	107
American College of Veterinary Pathologists	1951	864
American College of Veterinary Preventive Med. Certification in Epidemiology	1951	361
American College of Veterinary Radiology	1966	115
American College of Veterinary Surgeons	1970	357
American College of Zoological Medicine	1988	22
American Veterinary Dental College	1988*	8
American College of Emergency Medicine and Critical Care	1989*	19

\*provisional

Since this list was prepared, the new American College of Veterinary Clinical Pharmacology (ACVCP) was given provisional recognition at the March 5-6, 1990, meeting of the ABVS. The well-prepared petition was presented by Dr. Tom Powers.

At this same meeting, the petition of a proposed American College of Avian Medicine and Surgery (ACAMS) was reviewed, but provisional recognition was deferred pending further discussions with the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners on becoming an affiliate of that Board.

Two new practice categories were added to the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners. They are Dairy Practice and Feedlot/Cow-Calf Practice. These are in addition to the original categories of Companion Animal, Equine, and Food Animal Practice.

Other groups that have expressed interest in establishing specialties include Veterinary Informatics and Veterinary Animal Behaviorists. The ABVS will probably receive petitions from these and perhaps others in the next year or two.

### Criteria for a Specialty

The proposed specialty should:

1. Represent a distinct and identifiable segment of veterinary medicine.
2. Fill a clearly demonstrable need within the profession.

3. Intend to assure that improved veterinary medical service(s) will be offered to the public.
4. The Advisory Board also questions whether there is a critical mass in the discipline and persons willing to put in the time and effort to form the organization and prepare the examination.
5. The Board is also looking more critically at the availability of training programs for those wishing to prepare for the specialty.

If it appears that the above criteria are fulfilled, the Advisory Board works with the organizing group to try to find whether the discipline would fit best as a stand-alone specialty or as a subgroup of an existing College. With the increased interest in specialization and the increased number of specialty groups, this function of trying to create order is becoming a bigger challenge. The ABVS is planning a workshop this fall to discuss the big picture of specialties in veterinary medicine--how to be more proactive rather than reactive and how to handle the increased workload placed on the ABVS.

### Organizing a Specialty

A group wishing College or Board status is expected to submit a letter of intent at least a year before submission of a formal petition. The ABVS

assigns two members as liaison to act as a resource for preparation of the petition. The petition must substantiate the need for the College, contain the proposed constitution and bylaws, and the proposed organizing committee with curriculum vitae of each. The petition must also indicate the training programs for candidates and an alternate route for preparation, along with a general description on how the organization will get up and running, a roster of proposed officers, committees, plans for examination preparation, etc. The details of requirements are outlined in the ABVS *Policies and Procedures Manual*.

If the ABVS approves the petition, it is forwarded to the Council on Education of the AVMA. If it passes a review of this body, it is submitted to the AVMA Executive Board and House of Delegates with recommendation for provisional recognition. If consideration is not favorable at any stage of approval, the petition is returned to the ABVS with a statement of deficiencies found. After revision by the petitioners, the petition can be resubmitted.

Once provisional recognition is granted by the AVMA, the College or Board takes any needed steps to formalize their organization and function under their constitution and bylaws. The organization may collect dues, examine and certify candidates, send a representative to the AVBS meeting, and in general become fully operational.

### Monitoring Specialties

The ABVS annually reviews the activities of the new College or Board. In not less than two years or more than five years, the organization can petition for full recognition. By this time, routes for candidate preparation, credentials review, and examination protocols should be well established and the organization should have a track record that would imply continued viability and contribution to veterinary medicine.

Each year, each College or Board submits a statistical report for review by the Advisory Board. A comprehensive report is due when applying for full recognition and every five years thereafter. This five-year report is assigned to two members of the Board for careful review and presentation to the Board at the annual meeting.

Recommendation for continued recognition is on a year-to-year basis and is submitted to the Council on Education for approval and transmitted to the Executive Board and the House of Delegates. The track record of existing Colleges and Boards has been quite good. All have done well and have received continued recognition. Another function of the ABVS is the promotion of veterinary specialties to the public and within the profession. There is a committee of the ABVS addressing this issue.

Current concerns of the ABVS include the overall structure of specialties within the profession that will be addressed at the early winter planning session and the credentials review and examination procedures. Ideally, all qualified candidates should pass credentials review and the examination and all others should be rejected. We know that the ideal is not reality. However, Colleges and Boards should do all they can do to establish entry-level criteria and measure candidates against those criteria. Being too lenient will allow certification of unqualified candidates and not protect the public; being too critical is also bad because in time there will be as many truly qualified specialists that are not certified. Board certification will then no longer be a criteria for selecting a specialist. Several MD boards have become extinct because they became "private clubs." Arbitrary, invalid, or capricious actions in credentials review or examination are not only unfair to fellow veterinarians, but can also lead to legal challenges that are time-consuming and can be very expensive.

The above is a review of the Advisory Board and the place of specialties in the AVMA. As mentioned previously, details are available in the Policies and Procedures Manual--the "Bible" of the ABVS.

Again, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you and will be happy to address questions in the panel or personally at break time or later today. Thank you.

### References

Policies and Procedures Manual, the American Veterinary Medical Association Advisory Board on Veterinary Specialties, AVMA, Schaumburg, Illinois.