

The International Veterinary Nurses and Technicians Association (IVNTA) is a federation of national veterinary nurses and technicians associations. Its permanent members are the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), the Irish Veterinary Nurses Association, the National Association of Veterinary Technicians in America (NAVTA), the New Zealand Veterinary Nursing Association (NZVNA), the Registered Veterinary Technologists and Technicians of Canada (RVTTTC), and the Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA).

The IVNTA was founded in 1991 but became dormant for ten years between 2004 and 2014. The Association was revived in 2014 and a general meeting was held in England in 2015. General meetings are now held biennially with the IVNA hosting this year's meeting during their congress in Galway at the end of May. As part of the congress scientific programme, the IVNTA was invited to chair a panel discussion regarding veterinary nursing internationally. Speakers were Melanie O'Donoghue, representing veterinary nurses in Ireland, Hilary Orpet, representing veterinary nurses in the UK, Virginia Thomas, representing veterinary nurses and technicians in New Zealand, and Kenichiro Yagi representing veterinary technicians in the USA.

Each speaker gave an overview of veterinary nursing / veterinary technology in their country including; governance and structure of the profession, national qualifications, continuing professional development, scope of practice and utilisation of VNs / VTs, areas of specialisation, current challenges facing the profession, and forthcoming or future developments. Having representatives from four countries presenting consecutively meant that common themes and points of similarity could be highlighted and it was interesting to be able to compare and contrast the various approaches to the profession taken in each country.

In particular, some of the challenges facing the profession of veterinary nursing and veterinary technology seemed to be common to all countries; low wages, high attrition, shortage of experienced staff (including shortage of qualified +/- registered staff in countries where this is not a legal requirement), under-utilisation, and lack of opportunity for specialisation. This last point drew considerable attention since Ireland and New Zealand have no opportunities at all for specialist training and only limited opportunities for specialist employment. The USA and the UK by contrast do offer specialist qualifications and there are greater possibilities for specialist employment. It was felt that increased opportunities for specialisation both in terms of qualification and employment could reduce under-utilisation and improve job satisfaction, therefore potentially lowering attrition rates. If experienced VNs and VTs can be retained in clinical practice this would help to address the skill shortage that the industry is experiencing. Equally, if higher qualifications could be rewarded with increased remuneration, this would go some way to mitigating low wages in the sector.

At its general meeting, the IVNTA identified efforts to address shared challenges faced by VNs and VTs internationally as a long-term goal: following on from the issues raised in the panel discussion, perhaps one of the most practical steps it can take to achieve this goal is to support specialisation for veterinary nurses and technicians.