

# Veterinary Nursing Survey

**Between 2015 and 2016, the first national survey of the veterinary nursing profession in Ireland was carried out and commissioned by the Veterinary Council of Ireland. This independent body of work was completed by the market research company Behaviour & Attitudes Limited and the results were released during the IVNA congress last May, writes Lorraine McDonnell RVN**

The survey detailed questions asked of veterinary nurses in relation to their careers, opportunities, experiences and future ambitions. The aim of this research was to carry out an independent study among veterinary nurses to establish baseline data. As veterinary nursing is a relatively new profession, very little research had been carried out in the past.

The survey sent to 589 registered veterinary nurses (RVN), received 257 (44%) responses.

According to the survey, in Ireland at present, the average age of veterinary nurses is 32, with 25% married and 30% cohabiting. Nineteen out of 20 are women, with one in five having young children. With regards to qualification, 70% currently work as veterinary nurses, 27% in head nursing roles and 9% are employed as practice managers.

## EDUCATION

- 25% of those surveyed hold a Veterinary Nursing Certificate, while 20% hold a diploma and 55% hold a degree; 34% either hold, are studying for, or plan to study for a Bachelor's degree in practice management.
- In relation to continuing veterinary education (CVE), 77% of participants currently use webinars and distance learning for upskilling. Approximately 35% of CVE costs are personally-funded with 17% practice-funded. Approximately three days annual leave per person have been taken in the past year for CVE.
- In regards to collecting 12 CVE points per year, 91% claim achieving them is sufficient, whereas 18% said collecting CVE points was relatively very easy.

## WORKING LIFE

The majority of veterinary nurses are in full-time employment, with 83% in roles they described as permanent, 9% occupy temporary employment and 4% are currently unemployed.

The majority of veterinary nurses work in small animal and mixed practices, with some in alternative animal-related roles, such as pharmaceutical reps. Within the first four years after qualification, four out of five nurses have already left the sector. The survey also revealed that 31% of veterinary nurses anticipate leaving the profession in the next few years.

The average working week consists of 38 hours per week with approximately 10 hours overtime per month. Annual gross salary is approximately €24k, which varies in relation to length of qualification. Those who qualified in 2009 tend to earn €27k and those newly qualified get an average of €20k per year.

Issues raised by participants:

- Remuneration, working conditions and transparency in pay scale.
- Practices hiring unqualified personnel.
- Would like better opportunities, including career progression.
- More respect and recognition from clients and vets.
- Better work/life balance.

## TERMS OF EMPLOYMENT

Sixty-six per cent have a contract of employment and 63%



have a job description. Only a quarter of those surveyed receive an annual appraisal, with 14% part of a bonus scheme or performance-related pay scheme. One in four are on a defined pay scale that incurs increments.

### ATTITUDES TO THE PROFESSION

Veterinary nursing is very stressful although four out of five surveyed feel they have job satisfaction and more than nine out of ten feel the work provides significant variety. Issues raised:

- Limited opportunities available;
- Doubts in relation to family-friendly occupation;
- Work of vet valued more than nurses;
- Doubt input of the veterinary nurses is valued by vets themselves;
- With regards to veterinary nurses in training, 50% feel that there are too many nurses in training;
- With issues relating to inadequacy of pay, many are worried that over-supply may cap wage progression;
- Views were different on the calibre of newly qualified veterinary nurses where doubt has arisen regarding the adequacy of their day-one skills and perhaps training could be provided.

### REPRESENTATIVE BODIES AND REGULATOR

There was very positive feedback towards both the Veterinary Council of Ireland (VCI) and Irish Veterinary Nursing Association (IVNA). Veterinary Nurses were satisfied with the flow and quality of information from VCI. Within the profession the following points were highlighted:

- Anxiety about asserting their rights and agitating for better treatment and recognition;
- Veterinary nurses need to become more assertive;
- Insufficient dialogue within profession about roles of veterinary nurses;
- Feel that practices do little to ensure the veterinary nurse's rights are respected.

With specific questions being asked of veterinary nurses that participated, some interesting facts emerged:

- One-fifth of employed veterinary nurses have a second job, with one in seven being paid;
- Veterinary nurse's everyday role comprised mainly of clinical cleaning and caring for hospitalised animals;
- Over half administer pre-medication and carry out intravenous fluid therapy on daily basis. One in three work in a nurse's clinic;
- Only a third are asked to perform cutaneous suturing;
- One in eight visit clients during working hours;
- 74% of veterinary nurses are provided with dosimeters for their own use with 8% claiming to have shared access with other members of the practice;
- 40% of veterinary nurses take meal breaks, with one in seven rarely taking them at all;
- On average, veterinary nurses are entitled to 35 paid holiday days;
- 63% receive uniforms, while 59% are given discounts on products;

- 10% receive pension and 6% mobile phones;
- 42% believe they are not treated fairly with many unsure of maternity benefits and sick-leave provisions;
- Only 45% of veterinary nurses say that if they were to start their career again, they would choose the profession;
- For improvement within the profession, a call for better pay and remuneration was identified, with seven out of 10 wanting better opportunities for career progression.
- Facebook was deemed the most popular social media site;
- With regards to visiting the VCI website, 92% have visited it in the past with 70% using it to check their CVE.;
- 74% of veterinary nurses prefer VCI to contact them via email;
- When asked about the usefulness of the VCI newsletters, 79% thought it was useful.
- 96% of veterinary nurses felt that the VCI needed to become more active and vigilant in their inspection of practices and prosecution of personnel carrying out acts of veterinary nursing;
- Seven out of 10 would report a colleague if they had witnessed negligent, unsafe or unethical behaviour;
- While over 76% believe that these reports should be directed to their employer; just less than half 49% say the Veterinary Council should be contacted.

### SUMMARY

This survey has highlighted many issues within the veterinary nursing profession such as the feeling of insecurity, lack of professional recognition, lack of long-term prospects and a feeling of being an undervalued member of the veterinary team. The areas of employment conditions, employee rights and lack of career progression are also of great concern.

With these combined issues and the high rate of nurses leaving the profession, retention of qualified and experienced nurses is of significant concern. Stakeholders will gather to discuss the results of this survey and how to tackle some of the challenges identified in order to secure the future of the profession and nurture its development.

It is hoped that a second survey will be commissioned in the coming years in order to track changes and developing trends within the profession and initiate the establishment of the Veterinary Nurses Board of Ireland. We encourage all nurses to become involved in shaping the future of your profession by participating in such surveys and discussions and by contacting the IVNA with your comments and suggestions. It is vital the IVNA hears from its members if we are to accurately represent the needs of veterinary nurses nationwide.

The full report can be found on the VCI website: [www.vci.ie/News/News-Items/Report-on-the-Veterinary-Nurses-Survey/](http://www.vci.ie/News/News-Items/Report-on-the-Veterinary-Nurses-Survey/) or the IVNA website: [www.ivna.ie](http://www.ivna.ie)