

GUIDELINES FOR USE OF THE ABVP TITLE

Adopted by the
AMERICAN BOARD OF VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS

As the science of veterinary medicine has developed and expanded, there has been an ever increasing tendency for veterinarians to concentrate on specific areas of veterinary medicine. This has been true of veterinarians in practice, in research and in education. Many veterinarians have directed their studies to areas of specialized interest and applied their expertise to specific disciplines, animal species or specific organ systems.

In order to maintain an organizational framework for specialization, the AVMA established the Advisory Board on Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) to oversee the development of veterinary specialty organizations and to monitor their performance in providing certified specialists.

The use of a specialty title by a board-certified veterinarian presents a responsibility to correctly use the title in a way so as not to mislead the public or other veterinarians. The achievement of Diplomate status in a specialty organization is an achievement and an honor of which one should be proud. The responsible use of the title when representing oneself to the general public and to the veterinary profession is both appropriate and encouraged. Misuse of the title causes public confusion and polarization within the veterinary profession.

Problematic for the public and for the veterinary profession is a veterinarian with a special interest or expertise who has not been certified by an AVMA recognized specialty organization and advertises himself or herself as a specialist or uses terms which could be interpreted by the public as implying specialist status.

The ABVS and the Judicial Council of the AVMA annually receive numerous complaints of both inappropriate claims of specialty status by non-board certified veterinarians and misuse of specialty titles by board-certified veterinarians.

A. Proper and Permitted Uses of Title

The AVMA has maintained that promotion of oneself, one's services or practice is acceptable as long as that which is claimed is not false, deceptive or misleading.

The AVMA Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics maintain that use of the title of specialist is limited to those veterinarians who have been certified by an AVMA recognized specialty organization. Most state practice acts also adhere to this standard and restrict recognition to those who are truly board certified specialists. Since the ABVP is an AVMA recognized veterinary specialty organization, its Diplomates are permitted to refer to themselves as specialists, in their species category or categories.

The following style is recommended:

Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (Species Category), for example
Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (Equine Practice). The exact wording is preferred, though the acronym ABVP is permitted.

Other permitted styles include:

- Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners (Equine)
- Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Specialist Equine Practice
- Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Equine Specialist
- Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Certified in Equine Practice
- Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Board-certified in Equine Practice

The terms “practice limited to...” or “special interest in...” have been deemed to be appropriate for those who wish to designate their specific areas of practice without referring to themselves as specialists in those areas.

B. Incorrect Wording and Improper Use of Specialty Designation

Only those Diplomates actually certified in a subspecialty should claim that special area of expertise.

If a board certified specialist designates himself or herself as a specialist and then goes on to list other services or interests in the same notice that are outside of that specialty, it is easily inferred that the person is a specialist in those areas also. For example, a Diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners may list himself or herself as certified in clinical practice, and go on to list additional services, such as dentistry. This would falsely imply that the person was also certified in veterinary dentistry.

This type of misunderstanding must be avoided. Therefore, great care must be exercised by a specialist in wording and constructing notices. If uncertain as to the proper wording for such listings, the specialist should inquire with his/her specialty college or board and the ABVS/AVMA.

The following are examples of misuse or inappropriate use by non-certified individuals: “specialist in...”; “specialty of...” “specializing in...”; “special training in...”; “expert in...”; “advanced knowledge or training in...”; “...ologist” (e.g., dermatologist, echocardiologist); and “...ist” (e.g., internist).

C. Listing Oneself as “Board Qualified” or “Board Eligible”

Veterinarians who have completed residencies and/or training and credentialing requirements and have qualified to be examined, but for any number of reasons have not completed the examination and certification process, cannot advertise themselves as specialists. The ABVS has determined that the public would incorrectly view the use of these terms as an indication of specialty status, and has prohibited their use.

D. Listing of Facilities

Listings of facilities offering services by specialists should not be misleading to the public. To advertise a facility as one providing specialty services, without the presence of a board certified specialist in the facility, would be misleading. However, the listing of an emergency facility for animals does not imply that an animal's care will be monitored by a Diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care. Likewise, a facility title of "Specialty Services," which does imply the presence of a specialist, need not have 100% of the staff as specialists. Any and all listings of that staff must identify which are Diplomates and which are providing services limited to a specific area of expertise.

The majority of the staff veterinarians should be certified specialists of boards approved by ABVS/ AVMA. In all likelihood, there will be some services provided by individuals who have finished residencies and are preparing their credentials to sit for specialty board examination. Universities and group specialty practices, for example, would be allowed to advertise "Specialty Clinics" or "Specialty Services."

E. Academy Initials

There are many examples of academies in veterinary medicine which designate their members as fellows. Some veterinarians have used the initials of these academies following their name in professional notices. While this practice is not illegal, the listing of these initials should not be done in a way which implies that the user is a specialist. It is preferable that the full wording be used to reduce the appearance of inappropriate claims to specialty status.