

ABVP POSITION PAPER

WHAT DOES CERTIFICATION IN ABVP REPRESENT?

The founders of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners felt that all specialty boards should exist for the benefit of the patient and the public. ABVP was to be a goal for clinicians in public and private practice, much the same as the American College of Physicians and the American Board of Family Physicians. These organizations and ABVP certify practitioners with exceptional knowledge, skill and competency in the care of the “total patient.” Referrals were never the goal of the founders. Rather, it was self-improvement of individual veterinary clinicians and then, through the process of recertification, the maintenance of competency.

ABVP was not created to compete with existing specialty organizations or to place non-certified general practitioners in a poor light. By raising the quality of veterinary service available to the public and the veterinary patient, there has been even greater utilization of discipline specialists such as surgeons and ophthalmologists. Non-certified clinicians and diplomates of other specialty organizations should not view the relationship negatively. This negative assumption could be equally applied to each specialty organization. In a positive light, ABVP should be seen as a way to improve the quality of veterinary services to the public.

Concern about what ABVP certification represents comes up most often in two situations. The first is when a board-certified specialist states the opinion that an ABVP Diplomate is not a true *specialist*, but what they would like to refer to as a *certified generalist*. This usually surfaces in a private practice situation where the discipline specialist feels threatened professionally by an ABVP Diplomate. The other situation is when ABVP Diplomates represent themselves, through claims or advertising, to be more than they are. This is offensive to both the non-boarded practitioners and the other board-certified veterinarians.

ABVP Diplomates are certified in *Clinical Practice* for the species in which the certification was granted. Clinical Practice as it pertains to veterinarians is the art and science of applying medical knowledge to animals for their care and the alleviation and prevention of their diseases.

Most veterinarians who are performing broad-based clinical practice are not board-certified. How do ABVP Diplomates differ from them, and how do discipline specialists differ from non-boarded veterinary practitioners who may limit their practice or claim to have a special interest or expertise in a certain discipline? The answer to both is in the depth of knowledge and competency in their field, the level of veterinary service the board-certified veterinarians are able to provide and the fact that they have demonstrated this by completing the certification process of a recognized specialty organization.

ABVP Diplomates provide much the same type of services as do many non-certified veterinarians. Certainly there are many non-certified practitioners providing veterinary services at a level equal to or above their ABVP colleagues.

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Some of these same non-certified practitioners have developed special skills in a particular discipline such as surgery or ophthalmology. The primary difference is that the board-certified Diplomates have pursued additional training in many instances, have made a serious commitment to continuing education and have demonstrated by the certification process that they are capable of providing a level of clinical practice that is clearly superior to the norm of the profession. It is the goal of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners that practitioners who excel in the art and science of clinical practice would seek certification.

Prepared by

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