

The South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) commenced in October 2015 with the process of promulgation of the profession of veterinary physiotherapist. The regulations and rules for this profession will be published in Government Gazette for comment within thirty days of the publication. After which the comments will be collated and considered.

Several enquiries; and a petition both in support of and against the promulgation of the profession of veterinary physiotherapist are currently considered by the SAVC.

To avoid confusion and misrepresentation of the facts a short question and answer sheet is compiled for your information.

A. Who will be considered for registration with the SAVC once the profession of veterinary physiotherapist is promulgated?

1. **Persons who are not the holders of qualifications that are prescribed** in terms of the Act for automatic registration purposes, **but** who practised the profession of a veterinary physiotherapist for a continuous period of at least five years prior to the date of publication of the profession of veterinary physiotherapist, and is wholly or mainly dependent on the practice thereof for his or her livelihood may apply for registration in the prescribed manner within six months from the date on which a final notice relating to the profession of veterinary physiotherapist was published. The acceptance of qualifications and experience under the so-called grandfather clause may include an examination. Please refer to the link in question B below to assess whether the services rendered are services pertaining to a veterinary physiotherapist.
2. **Persons who are the holders of prescribed qualifications.** Training institutions are invited to submit their Self-evaluations and curricula to the SAVC. These will be assessed against the minimum standards of training [See [Tables 10 A and 10 B](#)] by experts in the field and recommendations will be made to Council as to which of these qualifications are to be prescribed for automatic registration.

B. Will concerns be considered for those persons who are only involved in a limited field of practice?

Yes, a SAVC ad hoc Committee will look into registration and authorisation possibilities with a view to ensure that all concerns are addressed.

C. What services will be considered as services pertaining specially to the profession of a veterinary physiotherapist; and which services no other person may perform if not registered with the SAVC to perform such services?

Veterinary physiotherapy includes services as per this [link](#).

D. Which are the complementary fields to which the veterinary physiotherapist may refer but are not limited to?

- Chiropractic
- Saddle fitting
- Dentistry
- Acupuncture

- Farriery
- Nutrition
- Behaviourist

E. Why must professionals [veterinary physiotherapists] who are treating animals be regulated in SA?

1. Animal welfare and animal and human well-being are regarded as key objectives of the veterinary professions and the SAVC.
2. Animals cannot speak for themselves.
3. Unsuspecting owners may not know the difference between a suitably qualified professional and a lay person.
4. Untrained lay persons should not perform procedures on animals as it results in further injuries and/or complications to conditions in animals.
5. Lay persons who are not trained and who perform the services pertaining specially to that of a veterinary physiotherapist will be in contravention of the Veterinary and Para- Veterinary Professions Act, Act No 19 of 1982 if they are not registered with the SAVC and will have to account for illegal activities and/or harm caused to animals.
6. When animals are treated a firm diagnosis must either first be made by a veterinarian and/or a veterinarian must be consulted where there is no direct referral by a veterinarian to the veterinary physiotherapist. [Animals cannot speak for themselves].
7. Minimum standards of training and practice standards, set and monitored by the SAVC, will raise the standard of services to patients and clients.
8. Qualifications will be assessed by the SAVC and will be considered for registration purposes.
9. Patients will be treated within the latest scientific knowledge as registered veterinary physiotherapists will be required to maintain registration by keeping up to date with Continued Professional Development [CPD].
10. More opportunities and career paths will be created through regulation and development of the services of veterinary physiotherapists.
11. There will be alignment with international requirements as several countries regulate the services of veterinary physiotherapists.

F. Does the owner have a choice in who treats his/her animals?

Owners may choose who should treat their animals and will be able to make informed decisions about the best treatment /services for their animals.

G. Will the profession have representation on Council?

Yes, provided that registered representatives elect a representative to serve on Council.

H. What is the background to the establishment of a profession of veterinary physiotherapist?

Since the later 1980's the SAVC discussed the issue of illegal veterinary work performed on animals in contravention of Section 23 (1) (c) of the Act. Persons worked on animals without registration and /or suitable qualifications since the late 1980's in the field of veterinary physiotherapy.

During discussions on Council in the late 80's it was pointed out that there was no objection to human physiotherapists performing procedures on animal provided that they did so, on referral by a veterinarian, and that they were trained and registered to perform these services. However, it was pointed out that both veterinary nurses and human physiotherapists were not adequately trained **at the time** to perform veterinary physiotherapy.

In the late 80's several discussions took place between the SAVC and the Veterinary Nursing Association of SA [VNASA] as well as the South African Medical and Dental Council and an ad hoc committee of the professional board for Physiotherapy. Human physiotherapists were divided on treatment of animals by human physiotherapists as some felt that human physiotherapists should not treat animals. The discussion also supported the idea that the human physiotherapist becomes the "client" of the veterinarian and not of the members of the public.

The professional board advised the SA Society of Physiotherapy in 1979 that the Board could not support the idea of including veterinary physiotherapy in the regulations defining the scope of the profession of physiotherapy as the Act only dealt with diagnosis, treatment and prevention of illness in man.

In 1989 an ad hoc Committee was appointed by the Board to investigate veterinary services by physiotherapists and to liaise with the South African Veterinary Association. The opinion was expressed that a number of veterinary nurses were in favour of a course in veterinary physiotherapy for veterinary nurses while some human physiotherapists were in favour of a course in animal anatomy for human physiotherapists in order to qualify as "veterinary physiotherapists."

In 1991 it was noted that there was a need for veterinary physiotherapy in SA especially in the horse racing industry. It was also reported that a new SA Association of Physiotherapists in Animal Therapy was formed. The VNASA expressed the opinion that no one group was qualified to perform veterinary physiotherapy. It was pointed out at the time that physiotherapy was one of the services deemed to pertain specially to the profession of a veterinary nurse. A recommendation was made then that the SAVC should regulate persons who were not registered with the SAVC, but who were treating animals indiscriminately and not subject to any regulations. Several options were considered to obtain suitable training for both veterinary nurses and veterinary physiotherapists [human physiotherapists working on animals]. The Medical and Dental Council did not approve of the suggestion that human physiotherapists are employed by veterinarians who would not be registered with the Medical and Dental Council.

The SAVC confirmed in 1992 that the physiotherapist could not work independently but could be brought into the treatment of an animal by a veterinarian. In 1993 the SAVC agreed that physiotherapy performed on animals could be better regulated if veterinary physiotherapists were registered with the SAVC. There was an informal understanding [gentleman's agreement] between the SAVC and the

Medical Council that registered human physiotherapists could work on animals only on the basis of referral by a veterinarian.

In 1994 the VNASA informed the SAVC that they supported a profession of veterinary physiotherapists as it was not possible to regulate the treatment of animals by human physiotherapists who rendered the services pertaining to veterinary nurses without such a profession being established. The VNASA also supported registration of human physiotherapists in terms of Section 23 (1) (c).

The need to establish a veterinary physiotherapy profession became more evident during the early 1990's. It was also confirmed in discussions with the Faculty of Veterinary Science, UP that post graduate training in veterinary physiotherapy for purposes of human physiotherapists was not an option as the latter undergraduate training did not deal with animal anatomy and physiology.

A meeting was held in 2007 between the Registrar of the SAVC and representatives of the Society and the main discussion point was *"conflicting legislation which exists between the Health Professionals Act (specifically pertaining to physiotherapy) and the Veterinary Nursing Act"*.

The South African Society of Physiotherapy requested the SAVC in 2012 to support the Society in a court application against a person who treated animals and referred to the service as that of a physiotherapist. The SAVC supported the principle that a person who is not authorised or registered should not perform veterinary and/or para-veterinary services. The S A Society of Physiotherapy could not legally make an application, however the SAVC had the right to make an application in terms of the Veterinary and Para Veterinary Professions Act, Act 19 of 1982. The SAVC's name would have been used when the application was drafted and a statement made that the person may not perform veterinary nurse procedures. The person in question had to sit the SAVC's registration examination and/or had to seek employment with a veterinarian and request authorisation.

The SAVC met with the human physiotherapists on 1 February 2012 and a report on the outcome is reflected as follows:

- The physiotherapists were of the opinion that some members of the profession had an interest in working on animals and could therefore participate in rendering the services of physiotherapy on animals;
- The physiotherapists [in South Africa] were concerned over the use of the term 'physiotherapy' in veterinary science, as there was no profession called animal physiotherapist;
- Concern was also expressed over the course being presented by Equine Librium in 2012. The physiotherapists were given the same advice that was given to the presenters of the course: that they had to first draft the scope of practice and the minimum standards of training for the recognition of animal physiotherapy as a profession; and
- The physiotherapists were requested to consult with the Veterinary Nurses Association of SA (VNASA) as rehabilitation was a component in the Diploma for Veterinary Nursing, services pertaining specially to a veterinary nurse.

The SAVC held a workshop in October 2012 to facilitate the discussions on a proposed new veterinary physiotherapy profession and to inform all stakeholders on the proposed establishment of a new

veterinary profession.

A work group was subsequently established and their work has come to fruition with the finalisation of the minimum standards of training and the scope of practice in 2015.