



## Policy on the use of titles

### 1 Definitions

The Veterinarians Act 2005 (s4) states that:

**veterinarian** means a person—

(a) who is a registered person; and

(b) who holds a current practising certificate.

A veterinary **specialist** is a veterinarian with approved post graduate qualifications, training and experience who has been registered as a specialist by the Veterinary Council of New Zealand.

**Courtesy titles** are titles with no legal validity which are applied or assumed through custom, courtesy, or association, for example Mrs, Mr, Dr, Sir, Lady.

### 2 Purpose of this policy

The Code of Professional Conduct requires veterinarians to act in a manner that promotes the public's trust and confidence in the profession. In promoting services and products, veterinarians must act fairly; represent their capability and competence accurately; not exaggerate any claim or comparison of a service or product over another; or overstate their skills and knowledge by using misleading descriptors.

### 3 Use of the title “Specialist”

The title ‘specialist’ may only be used by veterinarians who hold specialist registration with the Veterinary Council of New Zealand.

The Veterinarians Act, s33, provides that ‘*no person, other than a specialist, may use in connection with his or her business, trade, employment, calling, or profession any words, initials or abbreviations of the title “specialist” that are intended to cause, or that may reasonably cause any person to believe that the person using those words, initials or abbreviations is a specialist*’.

Abbreviations of “specialist” must only be used by those registered as Specialists.

### 4 Guidance on use of terms ending in “-ist”

Care must be taken when using terms ending in “-ist”, as such terms can convey to the public that the bearer is a specialist.

Titles that have medical equivalents (e.g. cardiologist, dermatologist) are well known by the public as medical specialties. These are likely to convey that the veterinarian using the title is a specialist, and these titles should therefore be avoided.

Where there is a low risk of the public incorrectly assuming that a veterinarian is a specialist, the Council will consider applications to use the ending “-ist”. It is recommended that contact is made with the VCNZ Registrar for consideration and guidance.

## **5 Specialists in training**

Terms such as “resident” or “intern” may be confusing to members of the public who are more familiar with these terms in a medical context. VCNZ recommends that these terms be used with a descriptor, e.g. “Veterinary Resident”.

## **6 Use of the term “consultant”**

The meaning of the term “consultant” varies according to context.

A “consultant to” a certain group or club does not imply specialisation, and is therefore acceptable.

A “consultant in” a certain veterinary field may imply specialisation in that field and therefore use of this title is best avoided.

## **7 Guidance on advertising and describing particular interest areas**

Veterinarians may advertise areas of interest, but must ensure they do not imply that they are specialists if they are not. Terms such as “specialising in” should be avoided.

Use of the word “expert” may imply specialisation, and should be avoided.

Veterinarians may use descriptors such as “veterinarian with a particular interest in...”. Use of terms such as “cat vet” and “bird vet” are acceptable, as they imply that the vet only sees these species, not that the vet is a specialist in those areas.

## **8 Use of courtesy title “Doctor”**

Veterinarians may use the courtesy title “Doctor” provided that in doing so there is no inference or suggestion that they hold a PhD (when they do not) or are a medical practitioner.

The legal requirements for the use of the title are that:

- there must be no inference or suggestion that the user is a medical practitioner or qualified to practise general medicine unless registered as such under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (section 7, HPCA Act and section 20, Summary Offences Act 1981)
- in the use of the courtesy title, the veterinarian must not purport to hold a doctorate or additional academic qualifications over and above those already held (section 20, Summary Offences Act 1981)

Veterinarians can ensure they meet the statutory requirements by qualifying the title “Dr” with a descriptor. For example Dr John Doe, veterinarian.

Retired veterinarians are entitled to continue to use the courtesy title “Dr” provided they do so with the descriptor “retired veterinarian”.

## **7 Summary of guidance**

- No veterinarian may use the title 'specialist' or infer that they are a specialist, unless they hold veterinary specialist registration with the Veterinary Council.
- Those training to be specialists may describe themselves as "Veterinary Resident".
- Veterinarians are entitled to use the courtesy title "Dr" provided that in doing so there is no inference or suggestion that they hold a PhD (when they do not) or are a medical practitioner.
- Retired veterinarians can use the courtesy title "Dr" provided they do so with the descriptor "retired veterinarian".

### **Acceptable terms**

- "professional interest in..."
- "particular interest in..."
- "cat vet"
- "consultant to..."
- "veterinary resident" (if undergoing specialist training)

### **Unacceptable terms (if not registered as a specialist)**

- abbreviations of "specialist"
- "cat expert"
- "consultant in..."
- specialist descriptors that are also used in the medical profession, e.g. cardiologist

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