

American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Guidelines on the Identification of Board Certified Veterinarians

(Approved by the Executive Board April 1999; accepted without revision by ABVS February 2005)

As the science of veterinary medicine has developed and expanded, there has been an ever-increasing tendency for veterinarians to concentrate their professional efforts on specific areas of veterinary medicine. Some have secured advanced education and training to become board certified by a veterinary specialty college or board that is recognized by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

In order to maintain an organizational framework for board certification, the AVMA established the American Board of Veterinary Specialties (ABVS) to oversee the development of veterinary specialty colleges or boards and to monitor their performance in providing board certification. A veterinarian who meets the rigorous education and training standards of an AVMA-recognized specialty college or board is awarded a diploma and is referred to as a diplomate of that college or board.

To identify one's diplomate status accurately and responsibly, it is important that board-certified veterinarians use very specific wording. Each recognized specialty college or board is encouraged to provide specific guidance to its members regarding the correct wording for its organization.

The following style is recommended:

Board Certified by or Diplomate of, Name of Specialty College or Board

For example:

Board Certified by the American College of Veterinary Surgeons, or
Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Surgeons;

Diplomates of those specialty organizations with affiliate or subgroup categories should use the following format.

Board Certified in Equine Practice by The American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, or
Diplomate, American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Board Certified in Equine Practice
Board Certified in Cardiology by The American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, or
Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, Board Certified in Cardiology

When a diplomate of an AVMA-recognized veterinary specialty organization publishes an article in a veterinary journal, it is appropriate to use an acronym to identify the specialty college or board as indicated below. Acronyms should not be used in publications directed to the general public because they are unlikely to be understood. For example:

Name, Diplomate, ACVO, or
Name, DACVO

Name, Diplomate, ACVIM (Cardiology)
Name, DABVP (Equine Practice)

The AVMA Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics state: "It is unethical for veterinarians to identify themselves as members of an AVMA-recognized specialty organization if such certification has not been awarded." Only those who are board certified may claim that status. Only those veterinarians who have been certified by an AVMA-recognized specialty organization should refer to themselves as specialists.

Board certified status in an AVMA-recognized specialty organization is an achievement and an honor of which one should be proud. Responsible use of the title when representing oneself to the general public and to the veterinary profession is both appropriate and encouraged. A board certified specialist who also lists other services in an advertisement or notice should use care in wording the document so that it does not imply board certified specialty status regarding the other services. In the opinion of the AVMA and the ABVS the terms "board eligible" or "board qualified" are misleading and should not be used by any veterinarian. One is either board certified, having met all of the criteria of the specialty college or board, or one has no board credentials.