



Veterinary Board of Tasmania

December Newsletter 2017

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CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Welcome to the 2017 end of year newsletter.

The new Board is now half way through their term with the new members settling in very well. Having said that, some of you will be aware that Andrew Davis, the DPIPWE representative resigned from the Board in the middle of this year as he was moving interstate for another career opportunity. Mary-Lou Conway, who many of you would already know very well was appointed as Andrew's replacement and has only attended one meeting so far. In 2017, we held two meetings with the profession to enable veterinarians to meet the Board members and registrar, be brought up-to-date on current issues and ask any questions. These meetings were held in Hobart and Launceston with a very good turn out to both – thank you. Unfortunately, there was a real lack of interest in the advertised north-west meeting so it was decided to cancel and try again in the first half of 2018. We will keep the north-westerners informed.

The Board recently reviewed and finalized the 'Supply and Use of Drugs in Veterinary Practice' standard. You should all have received a hard copy in the mail, and of course, it also appears on the Board website. It has always been the case that vets are only able to supply drugs to bona fide clients based on detailed knowledge of the client and their animal(s). This has never meant it is adequate to visit a property from time to time for a discussion with the farmer and neglect to clinically examine animals, collect appropriate samples for pathology etc.

As registered vets we all have a responsibility to only supply drugs as per the standard. Some farmers are not aware of the legal parameters that we have to abide by, but this is no excuse for being persuaded by them (or convincing yourself) to supply drugs without the appropriate clinical knowledge of their animals. Apart from that, it is just good, professional, veterinary medicine to fully understand what is

happening with a client's animal(s). It is respectful to the client, their animal(s), and to yourself and your vet degree. The standard goes into quite a bit of detail on this subject so please take the time to familiarise yourself with it.

Practice inspections continued throughout the year with the majority of practices managing to at least meet or exceed the standards - congratulations. Disappointingly however, there were a small number of clinics offering services like surgery in premises that did not meet current standards. Do not hesitate to contact the registrar in the first instance if you ever have any doubt about the classification of your premises as it relates to the Standard of Veterinary Premises.

The number of complaints received by the Board in the last year has been fairly typical. The usual risk factors and problems have popped up and I repeat what I wrote 12 months ago – 'ineffective communication has been a significant factor in most complaints and the Board has also noted the high incidence of poor clinical notes accompanying some of these. Please keep detailed notes on all aspects of the case including things like recommendations and options discussed with the owner. These can be very useful in assisting the vet's defence. If information does not appear in the records kept, it is difficult for the Board to know what actually occurred, in spite of what the vet might recall and relate to the Board some months after the event. Detailed notes made at the time of consultation or hospitalisation are the order of the day.'

The Board wishes all Tasmanian vets and their families a very merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.

Neil Leighton

Chair

Professional Conduct

The Board understands that vets can be approached for veterinary advice in a host of circumstances outside their normal work environment, for example at social gatherings. While this is usually not problematic when the person seeking advice is an established client of the vet and the discussion involves an animal already under the care of that vet, problems arise when vets are asked to give advice or opinion on cases under the treatment of another vet. In the latter case, the client is effectively seeking a second opinion and the protocol set out in Standard 6 of the *Standard of Professional Conduct* must be followed. As such, vets should refrain from providing an opinion on the case until they have attempted to obtain details of animal's clinical history from the original treating vet. Alternatively, it is usually just far easier to avoid the situation and state that you haven't had the benefit of examining or seeing the animal so are really in no position to provide an opinion.

Vets should also be aware that when giving their professional opinion about an animal or its treatment in non-work settings, they remain bound by the usual professional obligations set out in the *Veterinary Surgeons Act* and the *Standard of Professional Conduct* and associated Veterinary Service Standards, including the requirement to make and maintain clinical records.

When approached for such advice, the Board recommends that the owner be directed back to the original vet in the first instance to discuss any concerns they might have. This does not mean that vets should not offer second opinions, but they should do so in an appropriate fashion i.e., by taking all reasonable steps to obtain the animal's history from the original vet and arranging an appointment to conduct a formal consultation with the owner and examine the animal.

Similarly, vets must not hinder a client's attempts to seek a second opinion for example by refusing to forward clinical records or information to the second vet. While clinical records remain the property of the treating vet, withholding records without good reason has the potential to damage both animal welfare and practitioner-client relationships.

Most importantly whether in informal conversation or in the course of their usual work, vets should not disparage the clinical approach or opinions of another vet but rather should discuss any differences in opinion or approach constructively. Ideally, differences in opinion should first be raised, politely and constructively, with the other vet, before any discussion with the owner.

In general, disparaging and defamatory remarks of any nature about other veterinary surgeons must be avoided. This includes written as well as verbal communication and encompasses all aspects of social media. Such remarks serve only to undermine the public's trust in the profession.

Furthermore, vets must not seek to enhance their business or professional standing, reputation or status at the expense of other practitioners, for example by drawing unfavourable, subjective comparisons between practitioners or practices. As an example, it would be acceptable to inform a client that your practice has an ultrasound, whilst practice B, to your knowledge, does not. It would be unacceptable, however, to state that your diagnostic facilities are better than practice B's.

If vets have a concern about the conduct or fitness to practice of another vet, they should first consider discussing those concerns with the vet in question. The Board recognises that this is not always possible or successful, at which point vets are invited to raise those concerns with the Board by contacting the registrar.

2016-2017 VBT Annual Report

The Board's Annual Report for the last financial year was tabled in parliament on 19 October 2017 by Jeremy Rockliff MP, Minister for Primary Industries and Water. A copy is available on the Board website.

If you are interested in statistics, there were 32 new registrations during 2016-17, and as at 30 June, there were 284 vets on the register. Nine of those did not renew and were removed from the register in July. However, there has been a steady trickle of new registrations since then and there are currently 285 vets on the register.

Welcome to new vets and new graduates

Coming into the New Year means a new round of graduates and experienced vets taking up positions in Tasmania. We extend a warm welcome to you all. To assist in settling into your new roles, it is recommended that you read the Veterinary Service Standards available on the website, <http://dpiwve.tas.gov.au/biosecurity-tasmania/animal-biosecurity/veterinary-board-of-tasmania/standards-of-practice-and-legislation> together with a number of Information Sheets.

Destruction of out of date/unwanted S8s

Following up on a question about who can destroy S8s, the Poisons Regulations state that an S8 may be destroyed by **two health professionals working jointly to destroy the substance.**

‘Health professional’ is defined to mean a dentist, medical practitioner, pharmaceutical chemist, registered nurse, midwife, nurse practitioner and **veterinary surgeon.**

In practical terms, the most obvious persons would be two vets at a practice. For single person practices, they would have to work with the local pharmacist (or doctor/nurse etc) or with a Poisons Inspector.

The entry in the Register Coded “X” then needs to be signed by both.

Advertising Veterinary Services

Vets are reminded to ensure that when they are advertising their services, and publishing information on their website or social media platforms that they do not use terms that may imply that they have greater expertise than they in fact have. Similarly, it is important to ensure that non- vets, whether an owner, practice manager or vet nurse, are not held out to be a vet. Even if it isn’t specifically stated, the issue is the public’s perception of their status.

It is acknowledged that sometimes it is a third party such as a web designer who drafts the words, but ultimately the vet is responsible for what appears.

The title of ‘specialist’ is reserved for a veterinary specialist so ‘special’ words are to be avoided – for example, it is not acceptable to say that the practice

offers a ‘specialised’ or ‘expert’ service or that they ‘specialise’ in certain methods or animals.

Changes to accreditation of veterinarians preparing companion animals for export

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has changed the requirements for accreditation of registered veterinarians preparing companion animals for export.

1. From 2 January 2018 DAWR no longer requires accreditation of registered veterinarians preparing companion animals for export. All veterinarians fully registered by a State or Territory Veterinary Board in Australia are able to prepare companion animals such as dogs, cats and pet birds for export from Australia.
2. All registered veterinarians are now eligible to purchase rabies vaccine for use when preparing dogs and cats for export (other restrictions on the use of rabies vaccine are unchanged).
3. The Accreditation Program for Australian Veterinarians (APAV) will no longer be a requirement for veterinarians to prepare companion animals for export.

Information to assist veterinarians preparing companion animals for export is available on the DAWR website

<http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/companion/vets>.

This information outlines the step by step process of preparing companion animals for export. All veterinarians preparing companion animals for export should refer to this information before proceeding with this process.

These changes will come into effect from 2 January 2018. DAWR’s website has been updated to reflect this change. The list of veterinarians on the department’s website will be removed in January 2018.

Please note there are no changes to the requirements for Australian Government Accredited Veterinarians (AAVs) preparing livestock for export.

Any questions, please contact

Leah Wells 02 6272 3858

Email leah.wells@agriculture.gov.au or

Geoff Offner on 07 4241 7822

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)

In the face of increasing antibiotic resistance, affecting both the medical and veterinary fields worldwide, the Board would like to remind vets of their duty to use antimicrobials responsibly.

Several resources are available to guide vets in appropriate antibiotic choice:

- DWAR's Antimicrobial Resistance site contains guidance for veterinary practice:
<https://www.amr.gov.au/>
- The Australian Veterinary Association Guidelines for prescribing, authorising and dispensing veterinary medicines:
https://www.ava.com.au/sites/default/files/documents/Other/Guidelines_for_prescribing_authorising_and_dispensing_veterinary_medicines.pdf
- The University of Melbourne's Veterinary Prescribing Guidelines for companion animals, horses and cattle:
<http://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/vetantibiotics/>
- The AIDAP (Australasian Infectious Diseases Advisory Panel) Antibiotic Prescribing Guidelines for dogs and cats:
<http://www.cve.edu.au/industry-guidelines>

Contact Details & Registration Renewals

The registration year now runs from 1 July to 30 June, so renewal notices are emailed out in May for renewal by 30 June. 2017-18 was the first 'full' registration year on the new system and worked well, with most responding to either the initial emailed notice or targeted reminder emails in June. A handful of vets had changed email addresses and phone numbers and had to be chased up, but overall the new process worked well.

Please let the registrar know if your email address and/or your work/personal address change. Most Board communications (including the Newsletters) are now sent by email, so unless an email bounces, the registrar won't know that the email has not been received.

Need your Registration number?

The registrar regularly receives request from vets for their registration number. While happy to provide it, it may be quicker to check either your Annual Renewal/Tax receipt certificate, or the Veterinary Register (pdf) on the Board website. The Register is updated after each Board meeting.

There is also a search facility for all Australian vets on the AVBC website

<https://avbc.asn.au/search-for-registered-vet/>

Please pass the newsletter on to your colleagues if it is received at a general practice email address.