



3 April 2017

## Learning from a complaint

Complaints are a stressful part of the job, but there's a lot to learn from the complaints we get.

The Complaints Assessment Committees and Notification Review Group look at issues raised with us. Their job is to establish what's happened, what led to the complaint, and how to prevent a similar situation from happening again.

Sometimes there's something to learn from a case that the whole profession should be aware of. That's what we're focusing on in this update.

Our [complaint outcomes page](#) summarises cases that have closed in the last year.

If you learn one thing from this update, we hope it's the importance of clear and effective communication, and that keeping good records will help you if you do ever have to respond to a complaint.

Remember to look at our [minimum practising standards](#) checklists on [communication and informed consent](#) and [record keeping](#) to make sure you're meeting the standards.

## Learnings for the profession

Make sure your record keeping is up to standard. Thorough records help the committees understand what's happened. If the records show you did what was expected, this can be strong evidence in your favour.

Clients under stress may not take in all the information you give them. Giving information to clients in writing can help.

Practice policies should be clearly communicated to clients.

You must give a client their records if they ask for them, even if you've already given them to another vet.

Meetings with clients should be held at a time and place that's mutually agreed.

Members of the public don't necessarily understand how after hours services operate. When they need the service, they're often under stress. It might be helpful to have information sheets at the clinic that explain about the service and how it works.

Clients holding their own animals during procedures may not be appropriate. It has the potential to lead to complaints if things don't go to plan.



## Dentals

We often hear from clients who are upset about the number of unexpected extractions during a dental procedure.

Make sure you give clients an estimate (which can be a range). If the number of extractions exceeds the estimate, you should update the client.

Consent forms should note that there could be more extractions than expected (and that this may mean more cost), and should ask what the client wants to do if this is the case - proceed, proceed up to a certain point, or seek the client's permission before proceeding.

Issues also arise if the client expects a call to update them and doesn't get one. Vets should make sure they meet clients' expectations around this.

As always, clear communication is key.



## Prescribing

We've just finished looking into a notification from Medicines Control at the Ministry of Health that raised potential concerns about whether a vet's prescribing was appropriate.

The vet wrote generic prescriptions (ie not for a specific animal) to obtain prescription medicines to hold in anticipation of use. There were also prescriptions for personal use.

The CAC closed this case with an educative outcome.

All vets need to be aware that:

- you can't prescribe for human use, including personal use
- you can write prescriptions for a prescription medicine for a specific animal and have these filled at a pharmacy
- you can purchase prescription medicines from a wholesaler to hold in anticipation of use but you can't write a generic prescription to obtain prescription medicines at a pharmacy to hold in anticipation of use.

For more information see the [NZVA Guide to Veterinary Authorising \(Prescribing\) and Dispensing](#) and read the full decision [here](#).



## Fitness of livestock for transport

Over the past few years we have received a number of notifications from MPI where they have raised concerns about Fitness of Livestock for Transport declarations. In the most recent case, a vet signed certificates for three cows. One had to be shot on arrival at the meat processing works.

This case closed with an educative outcome for the vet. You can read the full decision [on our website](#).

Signing a veterinary declaration is always a serious responsibility with firm expectations from the profession, the public and stakeholders. In the case of certificates of fitness to transport, animal welfare can be seriously compromised if animal welfare codes and guidelines are not followed and this is viewed very seriously by MPI. Vets who sign these statements need to be familiar with, and adhere to, the guidelines, to ensure that animal welfare isn't compromised.

If an animal needs a veterinary declaration that it's fit for transport, it's important for the vet to:

- make sure to use the most up-to-date version of the form (you can order this from [NZVA](#))
- make sure the animal is weight bearing on all four legs
- state how the animal is to be transported eg only on the lower level of the truck/trailer
- state that the animal(s) must be priority slaughtered on arrival at the plant
- state that the animal(s) must be transported to the nearest slaughter plant and by the most direct route
- state the name of the slaughter plant
- advise that the animal can only be transported so that it arrives on a day when animals are being processed and that it will not be held in lairage overnight
- record the Body Condition Score of the animal(s)
- accurately record the identification of the animal(s)
- make sure that the expiry of certificate does not exceed 7 days
- keep copies of the certificate.

A complete list of requirements and more information is available in:

[MPI's Codes of Welfare, including transport of animals](#)

[NZVA's guidelines on fitness of livestock for transport](#) are available on our website and were updated in 2015

[Animal Welfare](#) and [Professional Integrity](#) sections of the Code of Professional Conduct.

## Calling yourself a specialist

'Specialist' is a protected title. Specialists have worked hard to earn this title, and you can only use it if you're registered with us as a specialist.

If you're a vet with a particular area of interest, you may have done extra training in a certain area, and have skills that are different from other vets. You can still advertise your skills and experience, but make sure you don't imply you're a specialist if you're not.

Avoid saying you 'specialise in' or that you're an 'expert'. These could imply you're a specialist.

Instead say you have a 'particular interest' or 'professional interest' in an area, or that you're a 'cat vet'.

You can read [our policy](#) or contact [Wayne Ricketts](#) if you have any queries.



## March Vetscript

In the March issue of Vetscript, Wayne Ricketts farewells our former CEO Janet Eden. Vetscript is available to NZVA members, or you can [read the article on our website](#).

## A final note about complaints...

In the office, Iain McLachlan, Helen Arbuckle, and Helen Shanks deal with complaints and notifications. We know that being called by us to talk about a complaint is really stressful. We try to minimise this as much as it's possible to do so.

Our target is to complete 50% of complaint investigations in 6 months and 80% in 9 months. Sometimes it's quicker, sometimes it takes longer. Staff and the committees work hard to resolve things as quickly as possible, but we know it feels like a long time when you're going through it.

Last year Council approved an additional CAC, to help spread the work across more committees and get things done faster. So far, this seems to be helping.

Sometimes there aren't serious issues, but sometimes there are, and when this happens Council needs to follow up to make sure high standards are set for the profession.

The complaints process is a necessary and important part of professional regulation. Learning from the process your colleagues have been through might help you prevent a complaint, or deal with it if it happens.

Remember there's always support. Talk to your colleagues, family and friends. If you're an NZVA member, they can help. Remember that you're not the only one to go through the complaints process.

Feedback from vets who've been through the process is positive about dealing with staff at the office. If you are going through this process, and you have any questions, you can always call us.

## Under stress?

There's always support available to all vets from [Vitae](#) - and not just to help if you're dealing with a complaint. Vitae is available to all vets, all the time. You can contact Vitae on 0508 664 981.

This service is jointly funded by NZVA and Council.



## Antibiotics survey

Thanks to everyone who completed the recent survey on the advertising of antibiotics. The 487 responses indicated a resounding no to advertising antibiotics to end users. We'll report back more fully next month.