

VCNZ update

VETERINARY COUNCIL
OF NEW ZEALAND
Te Kaunihera Rata Kararehe o Aotearoa



Have your say on code change proposals

by Helen Beban, Professional Adviser, Veterinary Council of New Zealand

This is your chance to have a say on proposed changes to the Professional Relationships section of the Code of Professional Conduct and explanatory notes.

The code gives guidance on how your conduct will be judged if you are called into question. You need to be aware of the requirements.

The term “supersession” has been removed

Professional Relationships section 5 of the current code discusses supersession (defined as: *the act of taking over the clinical management of a case recently treated by another veterinarian*). The term has been removed in the proposed changes. Client transfer becomes the activity common to a referral, second opinions and the client moving to another practice.

Contacting a client who has sought a second opinion

The proposed code states that:

A first veterinarian must not contact the client in order to attempt to persuade them from attending the second veterinarian.

Conducting a professional “client exit interview” to establish the reasons for moving as a tool for learning and business improvement may be appropriate if carried out:

- » *in a way that is not perceived by the client as pressure to return to the first practice, and*
- » *takes place at an appropriate future time.*

Accessing, providing and documenting client information for second opinions, referrals and transfers

When a veterinarian has obtained client consent to access previous treatment details and then contacts the first veterinarian, they are acting as an agent of the client and entitled to seek the relevant clinical information on behalf of the client. The first veterinarian does not then have to contact and obtain the client’s permission in order to release the client details, but is entitled to ask to see the client’s consent.

A client is entitled to limit the extent of information that the second veterinarian is authorised to obtain from the first veterinarian. While this is unlikely to occur commonly, it is an important principle that veterinarians should be aware of, for example, the client may authorise the second vet to obtain clinical information relating to the case but not allow the transfer of financial information. This section engendered much debate during the recent roadshows.

The second veterinarian needs to document the client’s consent authorising them to release and obtain personal client information (including any limits set by the client on the extent of that information). Ideally, this would be with a consent form tailored to the circumstances, signed by the client and kept on file. If a signed consent form or emailed consent is not possible or practical, a note must be made in the patient’s clinical record at the time to document client consent was obtained.

Charging for provision of information

There is a new section on guidance for charging for provision of information following advice from the Privacy Commissioner.

Second opinion on recommendation for euthanasia

The legal requirement is detailed around allowing a client to seek a second opinion where a veterinarian proposes euthanasia for welfare reasons and the animal owner does not accept the recommendation.

Section 7: Support of colleagues

The proposed changes extend the requirement for all veterinarians to support colleagues, regardless of their experience:

Veterinarians must ensure that colleagues are appropriately supported, particularly in the case of newly registered and/or inexperienced veterinarians.

There are added details of the requirements of employers under the Health and Safety in Employment Act 1992 (and updated in 2013).

There is a new standard for employers if a veterinarian is required to comply with the Veterinary Council’s competence and/or health processes (assessment and monitoring). This includes cooperating with and facilitating all reasonable council requests that allow the timely and thorough assessment of the veterinarian and, where necessary, reassessment or monitoring.

You still have time to send in any comments by 5pm Friday 14 August to helen.shanks@vetcouncil.org.nz ■

