

Summer 2015-16

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REGISTRAR'S REFLECTIONS

Recently I was at my weekly water aerobics class when a latecomer apologised for her tardiness saying she was delayed because she had been attending a workshop on work/life balance. The workshop had recommended that everyone leaves work on time but had run over time so she was late for the class. We all had a good laugh but it got me thinking about the serious subject of how can veterinary surgeons achieve a balanced life and avoid succumbing to burnout and the stresses of the profession?

When I graduated in the eighties if anyone had raised the subject of a work/life balance they would have been told 'You are a veterinary surgeon; that is your life'. Thank goodness attitudes have changed since then.

We have all heard that veterinary surgeons as a profession are more prone than the general population to burnout and stress. Long hours plus the intellectual, emotional and physical demands of a veterinary career can be tough to deal with. There is less research about veterinary nurses but it is likely that they have the same issues.

I don't have all the answers but as with many things prevention appears to be better than cure. You might not be able to change the long hours or the nature of our profession but you can make yourself more resilient and make your own wellbeing a top priority. A good resource for ideas about how to achieve this is the British Veterinary Association website on the health and welfare of veterinary surgeons. The Link is <http://www.vetlife.org.uk/>.

I wish everyone a happy Christmas and a healthy, well balanced New Year.



Season's Greetings

The members and staff of the Veterinary Surgeons' Board wish everyone the very best for the festive season and a happy, healthy, prosperous New Year.

The Board's office will be closed from noon Thursday 24 December 2015 until 8.30am Monday 4 January 2016.

REGISTRATION RENEWALS

By now all registered veterinary surgeons, approved veterinary nurses and bodies corporate should have received their annual renewal notice. If you haven't received your notice please contact the Board office on 9317 2353.

The absolute deadline for the payment of your renewal fee is 31 December 2015. As previously stated the Board office will be closed from 12.00pm on 24 December 2015 and will reopen at 8.30am on 4 January 2016. During this time you will be able to pay your renewal via the Board's website, by direct debit, post or by fax, but not over the telephone.

As of 1 January 2016, veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses who have not renewed will not be able to legally work as a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse in WA.





ARE YOUR POSTAL AND EMAIL ADDRESSES CURRENT

If you have changed your postal address or email address you need to let the Board know. Contact information can be updated by logging in to your account on the Board's website www.vsbwa.org.au, by phoning the Board Office on 9317 2353 or by email admin@vsbwa.org.au.



CONFIDENTIALITY OF CLIENT AND ANIMAL DETAILS

The Board continues to receive complaints about inappropriate access and use of information about clients or their animals on veterinary hospital databases or information contained on microchip databases.

The veterinary/client relationship is founded on trust and, in normal circumstances, a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse should not disclose without permission to any third party any information about a client or their animal given by the client, revealed by clinical examination, by post-mortem examination or obtained via a microchipping database. This duty also extends to support staff. Further, the information should not be accessed for personal use.

Veterinary surgeons are encouraged to formulate formal policies regarding client confidentiality and ensure that all staff are aware of the requirements. It is important that clear protection mechanisms are introduced to prevent information such as that held on microchip databases being accessed inappropriately. However, it should be noted that while the duty of confidentiality is critical it is not absolute and information can be disclosed in certain circumstances. Legal advice should be sought if in doubt.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT FOR REPORTABLE DISEASES IN COMPANION ANIMALS

Australia is free of many reportable animal diseases that affect human health and animal welfare as well as access to international or interstate markets.

Reportable diseases that could affect companion animals include rabies, leishmaniosis and canine brucellosis. Avian influenza and Newcastle disease are important reportable diseases found in birds. The Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) will often subsidise laboratory charges for testing conducted at the Animal Health Laboratories for exclusion of reportable diseases.

DAFWA has recently assisted a Perth small animal veterinarian in diagnosing the first WA case of pigeon paramyxovirus 1 (PPMV1) in a fancy pigeon loft in the Perth metropolitan area. PPMV1 is a reportable disease, which was first detected in Australia in Victoria in August 2011 and subsequently in New South Wales and Tasmania.

This case of PPMV1 illustrates the importance of all veterinarians being on the lookout for unusual disease events that may involve a reportable or emerging disease.

If you see signs suggestive of any reportable disease, there is a legislative responsibility to report it to DAFWA. Please report it to your DAFWA Field Veterinary Officer, Animal Health Laboratories on (08) 9368 3351 or the Emergency Animal Disease Watch hotline on 1800 675 888.

For more information about PPMV1, see the DAFWA website at the following link: www.agric.wa.gov.au/livestock-biosecurity/pigeon-paramyxovirus-ppmv1 or search 'pigeon' at agric.wa.gov.au

SPECIALIST REGISTRATIONS

Congratulations to the following veterinary surgeons who have received specialist registration:

Dr Steven Kenneth Joslyn Veterinary Diagnostic Imaging
Dr Justin McNaughton Veterinary Reproduction

Congrats





EXEMPTION CERTIFICATES FOR MICROCHIPPING

A veterinary surgeon recently rang the Board concerned as they had heard of 'a lot of vets writing (microchipping) exemptions for dogs that are old or that do not go out' and had doubts about whether this was appropriate. The veterinary surgeon felt that the certificates were being provided casually and without sufficient justification.

A veterinary surgeon can issue an exemption certificate if microchipping or sterilising a cat or dog will have a negative impact on the cat or dog's health or welfare due to age, illness or injury.

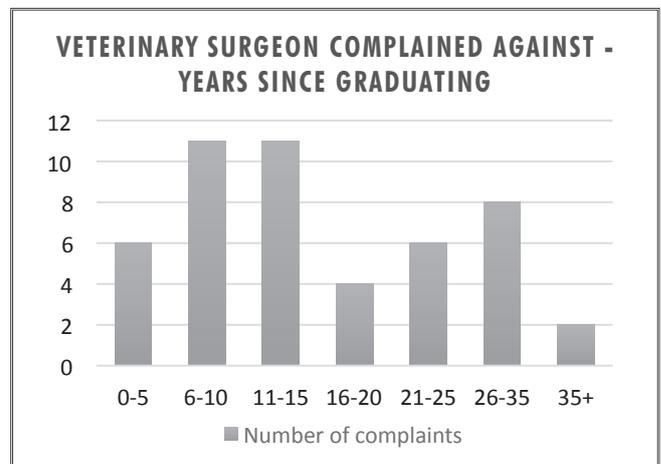
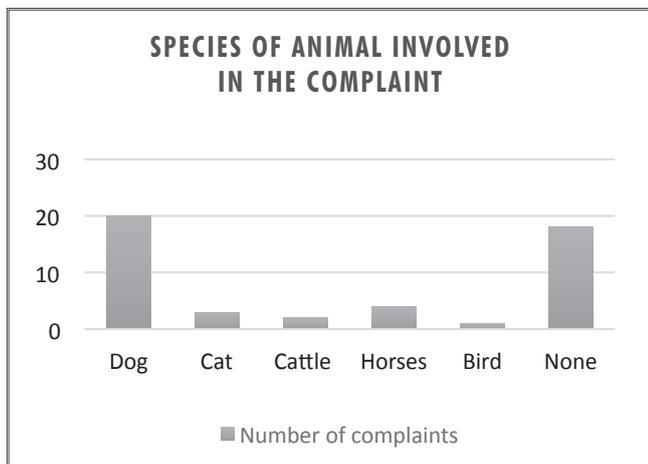
However, when a veterinary surgeon provides a microchipping exemption certificate, they must prepare it with care and accuracy and they must genuinely be of the opinion that microchipping could 'adversely affect the health and welfare' of the dog or cat that is the subject of the certificate.

A veterinary surgeon signing an exemption certificate when they know it contains false or misleading information may be liable to a maximum fine of \$5,000 under dog and cat legislation or prosecution for unprofessional conduct by the Board.

For further information about veterinary surgeons' obligations in regards to microchipping exemption certificates for dogs and cats, refer to the Department of Local Government and Communities fact sheet. A copy is available on the Board's website at www.vsbwa.org.au in the 'Vets' tab under Publications.

COMPLAINTS 2014/2015

During the 2014/2015 financial year 48 new written formal complaints were investigated by the Board. Dogs were by far the most common animal (20 complaints) involved in a complaint against a veterinary surgeon. A slightly smaller number (18 complaints) did not directly involve the treatment of animals. These involved such matters as complaints about inappropriate advertising, failure to pass on clinical records, implying specialist status, self medication and dishonesty issues.



A significant number of complaints were received against recent graduates but the majority of complaints were received against veterinary surgeons who had been practising for between 6 and 15 years. After that there was a drop off and then a gradual rise the longer a veterinary surgeon had been in practise. Due to the low numbers the figures are not statistically significant but it is a pattern that has been fairly consistent over the years and it is interesting to speculate on the reasons for it.

It should be noted that these statistics are for all complaints investigated by the Board.

DON'T LOSE YOUR VETERINARY NURSE BADGE

Approved veterinary nurses are reminded to take good care of their veterinary nurse badge issued by the Board as we are unable to replace them if they are lost or misplaced.



COMPLAINTS AGAINST VETERINARY NURSES

It is unusual for the Board to receive formal complaints against approved veterinary nurses, however last financial year the Board received three.

For one of the complaints, the Board determined that the veterinary nurse had not behaved unprofessionally. For another complaint, the Board determined that a veterinary nurse had behaved unprofessionally by accessing client contact information for their personal use, but it was not in the public interest to impose a penalty in this instance.

The final complaint was referred to the Board by the Department of Health and was against a veterinary nurse who admitted forging the signature of a veterinary surgeon on a prescription, and faxing the prescription to a pharmacy for the medication to be dispensed to the client. At a hearing the Board determined that the veterinary nurse had behaved unprofessionally and reprimanded her.

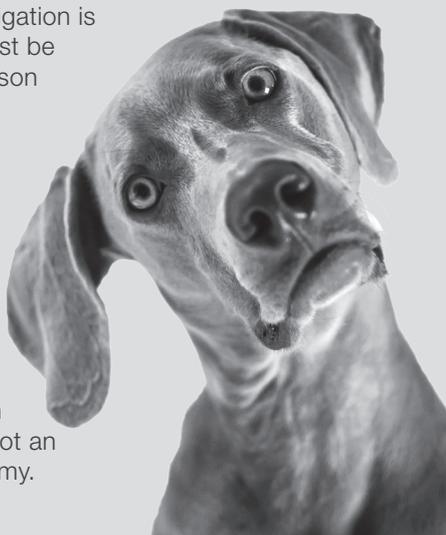
VASECTOMY AND TUBAL LIGATION IN DOGS

The Board regularly receives queries from veterinary surgeons who are requested by dog owners to perform vasectomies or tubal ligations on their animals and will not consent to the usual castration or spay despite having the benefits explained to them.

In relation to a vasectomy, the Board considers it acceptable for a veterinary surgeon to perform the procedure on an animal with the owner's informed consent and understanding of the risks associated with the procedure. The Board does not consider that vasectomy should be used routinely as a sterilisation procedure in dogs as it does not produce the behavioural changes associated with castration. Any sterilisation certificate must clearly state the animal has been vasectomised rather than castrated.

In relation to tubal ligation, the Board considers that the appropriate routine sterilisation procedure in bitches is an ovariohysterectomy requiring the removal of both ovaries and uterus.

The Board does not consider that tubal ligation is an appropriate procedure for routine sterilisation of bitches. If tubal ligation is performed, it must be for a specific reason with the owner's knowledge and informed consent. Any certificate issued by the veterinary surgeon must reflect that tubal ligation has been performed and not an ovariohysterectomy.



STANDARD OF CLINICAL RECORDS

The standard of clinical records remains a concern for the Board. It is common for the Board to receive notes which have a diagnosis recorded but no justification for the diagnosis, or alternatively animals are being treated without any diagnosis being recorded at all. Overall it is pleasing that there appears to be some improvement in the recording of medications but it is still not up to the standard required.

For further information on requirements for clinical records refer to the Veterinary Surgeons Handbook on the Board's website at www.vsbwa.org.au or regulation 30 of the Veterinary Surgeons Regulations 1979.



THE VETERINARY SURGEONS' BOARD OF WA

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

Chair: Dr P Punch AVA Nominee
Deputy Chair: Ms F Calley Ministerial Appointment
Dr M Paton Dept of Agriculture and Food
Dr M Culliver Elected Member
Dr R Stone Elected Member

HOW TO CONTACT US

Registrar: Dr Sue Godkin
Postal Address: PO Box 1721 Melville South WA 6156
Office: Suite 1, First Floor, Melville Professional Centre,
275 Marmion Street, Melville WA 6156
Telephone: (08) 9317 2353 **Facsimile:** (08) 9317 2363
Email: admin@vsbwa.org.au **Web:** www.vsbwa.org.au

