

# Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses

**2012**



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# Preface

## How to use this Code

The Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses is set out in this booklet and is also published on the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS) website at **[www.rcvs.org.uk/VNcode](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/VNcode)**.


There are 27 chapters of supporting guidance on the RCVS website, along with further general information.

References to the supporting guidance appear in [square brackets] in the text and are listed on pages 14 and 15; each chapter of supporting guidance can then be accessed online using the corresponding short link.

### Example:

To read more on [Giving evidence in court], turn to page 15 to find the short link '[/vn/evidence](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vn/evidence)', then type **[www.rcvs.org.uk/vn/evidence](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/vn/evidence)** into a web browser.

Alternatively, the supporting guidance can be accessed by scanning the quick response (QR) code on page 15 using a QR code scanner on a smart phone or tablet.

References to general information are accompanied by an  icon and listed on page 16.

## Other sources

A full PDF version of the Code and supporting guidance can be downloaded from **[www.rcvs.org.uk/VNcode](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/VNcode)**.

Print-outs of supporting guidance chapters may be requested from the Professional Conduct Department (details below).

Additional copies of this booklet may be ordered via **[www.rcvs.org.uk/publications](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/publications)**.

## Contact the Professional Conduct Department

For any questions relating to this Code, or for advice on professional conduct matters, please contact the Professional Conduct Department (020 7202 0789 / **[profcon@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:profcon@rcvs.org.uk)**).

# Introduction

## The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is responsible for overseeing the education of UK veterinary nursing students; the registration (and, pre-2003, the listing) of UK veterinary nurses; and, the fitness to practise (conduct, health and performance) of registered veterinary nurses (RVNs). Only those appropriately registered with the RCVS have the right to practise veterinary nursing in the UK.

The RCVS regulates the veterinary nursing profession through the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, the Royal Charter and the Veterinary Nursing Rules, to protect the public interest and to safeguard animal health and welfare.

## Declaration on professional registration

Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. For this reason, on registration with the RCVS, and in exchange for the right to practise veterinary nursing in the UK, every registered veterinary nurse makes a declaration, which, since 1 April 2012, has been:

*"I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and that, ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."*

## About the Code of Professional Conduct

The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct sets out veterinary nurses' professional responsibilities. Supporting guidance provides further advice on the proper standards of professional practice. The Code and supporting guidance are essential for veterinary nurses in their professional lives and for RCVS regulation of the profession.

On occasions, the professional responsibilities in the Code may conflict with each other and veterinary nurses may be presented with a dilemma. In such situations, veterinary nurses should balance the professional responsibilities, having regard first to animal welfare.

## Principles of practice

Veterinary nurses seek to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to their care and to fulfil their professional responsibilities, by maintaining five principles of practice:

1. Professional competence
2. Honesty and integrity
3. Independence and impartiality
4. Client confidentiality and trust
5. Professional accountability

The RCVS Code of Professional Conduct and supporting guidance should be considered in the context of the five principles of practice.




## Professional responsibilities

Veterinary nurses have professional responsibilities in the following areas:

1. Veterinary nurses and animals
2. Veterinary nurses and clients
3. Veterinary nurses and the profession
4. Veterinary nurses and the veterinary team
5. Veterinary nurses and the RCVS
6. Veterinary nurses and the public

## 1. Veterinary nurses and animals

- 1.1 Veterinary nurses must make animal health and welfare their first consideration when attending to animals.
- 1.2 Veterinary nurses must keep within their own area of competence and refer cases responsibly.  
[  Education ] [1. Referrals and second opinions]
- 1.3 Veterinary nurses must provide veterinary nursing care that is appropriate and adequate.  
[2. Veterinary care]
- 1.4 Veterinary nurses in practice must take steps to provide emergency first aid and pain relief to animals according to their skills and the specific situation.  
[3. 24-hour emergency first aid and pain relief]
- 1.5 Veterinary nurses who supply and administer medicines must do so responsibly.  
[4. Veterinary medicines]
- 1.6 Veterinary nurses must communicate with veterinary surgeons and each other to ensure the health and welfare of the animal or group of animals.  
[5. Communication between professional colleagues]
- 1.7 Veterinary nurses must ensure that clinical governance forms part of their professional activities.  
[6. Clinical governance]

## 2. Veterinary nurses and clients

- 2.1 Veterinary nurses must be open and honest with clients and respect their needs and requirements.
- 2.2 Veterinary nurses must provide independent and impartial advice and inform a client of any conflict of interest.  
[11. Communication and consent]  
[7. Equine pre-purchase examinations]
- 2.3 Veterinary nurses must provide appropriate information to clients about the practice, including the costs of services and medicines. [9. Practice information and fees]  
[10. Fair trading requirements]
- 2.4 Veterinary nurses must communicate effectively with clients and ensure informed consent is obtained before treatments or procedures are carried out.  
[11. Communication and consent] [12. Use and re-use of samples, images, post-mortems and disposal]  
[8. Euthanasia of animals]
- 2.5 Veterinary nurses must keep clear, accurate and detailed clinical nursing and client records.  
[13. Clinical and client records]
- 2.6 Veterinary nurses must not disclose information about a client or the client's animals to a third party, unless the client gives permission or animal welfare or the public interest may be compromised. [14. Client confidentiality]
- 2.7 Veterinary nurses must respond promptly, fully and courteously to clients' complaints and criticism.

### 3. Veterinary nurses and the profession

3.1 Veterinary nurses must take reasonable steps to address adverse physical or mental health or performance that could impair fitness to practise; or, that results in harm, or a risk of harm, to animal health or welfare, public health or the public interest.

[15. Health Protocol] [16. Performance Protocol]  
[20. Whistle-blowing]

3.2 Veterinary nurses who are concerned about a professional colleague's fitness to practise must take steps to ensure that animals are not put at risk and that the interests of the public are protected.

[15. Health Protocol] [16. Performance Protocol]  
[20. Whistle-blowing]

3.3 Veterinary nurses must maintain and develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice and competence, and comply with RCVS requirements on the Period of Supervised Practice (PSP) and continuing professional development (CPD).

[  Education] [  Veterinary Nursing Bye-Laws]

3.4 Veterinary nurses must ensure that all their professional activities are covered by professional indemnity insurance or equivalent arrangements.

3.5 Veterinary nurses must not hold out themselves or others as having expertise they cannot substantiate, or call themselves or others a 'specialist' or similar, where to do so would be misleading or misrepresentative.

[23. Advertising and publicity]

## 4. Veterinary nurses and the veterinary team

4.1 Veterinary nurses must work together and with others in the veterinary team and business, to co-ordinate the care of animals and the delivery of services.

[17. Veterinary team and business]

4.2 Veterinary nurses must ensure that tasks are delegated only to those who have the appropriate competence and registration.

[18. Delegation to veterinary nurses] [19. Treatment of animals by unqualified persons]

4.3 Veterinary nurses must maintain minimum practice standards equivalent to the Core Standards of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme.

[  RCVS Practice Standards Scheme]

4.4 Veterinary nurses must not impede professional colleagues seeking to comply with legislation and the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct.




[20. Whistle-blowing]

## 5. Veterinary nurses and the RCVS

5.1 Veterinary nurses must be appropriately registered/listed with the RCVS.

[  Registration]

5.2 Veterinary nurses must provide the RCVS with their PSP and CPD records when requested to do so.

[  Education] [  Registration] [  Veterinary Nursing Bye-Laws]

5.3 Veterinary nurses, and those applying to be registered as veterinary nurses, must disclose to the RCVS any caution or conviction, including absolute and conditional discharges and spent convictions, or adverse finding which may affect registration, whether in the UK or overseas (except for minor offences excluded from disclosure by the RCVS).

[  Registration]

5.4 Veterinary nurses, and those applying to be registered as veterinary nurses, must comply with reasonable requests from the RCVS as part of the regulation of the profession, and comply with any undertakings they give to the RCVS.

[  Complaints]

5.5 Veterinary nurses must report to the RCVS those veterinary nurses removed from the RCVS Register at the direction of the RVN Disciplinary Committee who nevertheless undertake veterinary surgery in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966.

[17. Veterinary team and business]

## 6. Veterinary nurses and the public

6.1 Veterinary nurses must seek to ensure the protection of public health and animal health and welfare, and must consider the impact of their actions on the environment.

[4. Veterinary medicines]

6.2 Veterinary nurses must report facts and opinions honestly and with due care, taking into account the 12 Principles of Certification.

[21. Certification] [22. Giving evidence for court]

6.3 Veterinary nurses promoting and advertising products and services must do so in a professional manner.

[23. Advertising and publicity]

6.4 Veterinary nurses must comply with legislation relevant to the provision of veterinary services.

[24. Named Veterinary Surgeons] [25. Recognised veterinary practice] [26. Working hours]

6.5 Veterinary nurses must not engage in any activity or behaviour that would be likely to bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession.

[27. Miscellaneous]

## Supporting guidance

1. Referrals and second opinions [/vn/referrals](#)
2. Veterinary care [/vn/vetcare](#)
3. 24-hour emergency first aid and pain relief [/vn/247care](#)
4. Veterinary medicines [/vn/vetmeds](#)
5. Communication between professional colleagues [/vn/communication](#)
6. Clinical governance [/vn/clinicalgovernance](#)
7. Equine pre-purchase examinations [/vn/ppe](#)
8. Euthanasia of animals [/vn/euthanasia](#)
9. Practice information and fees [/vn/fees](#)
10. Fair trading requirements [/vn/fairtrading](#)
11. Communication and consent [/vn/consent](#)
12. Use and re-use of samples, images, post mortems and disposal [/vn/samples](#)
13. Clinical and client records [/vn/records](#)
14. Client confidentiality [/vn/confidentiality](#)
15. Health Protocol [/vn/health](#)



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|---|------------------------------------|
| 16. Performance Protocol                        | <a href="#">/vn/performance</a>    |
| 17. Veterinary team and business                | <a href="#">/vn/vetteam</a>        |
| 18. Delegation to veterinary nurses             | <a href="#">/vn/delegation</a>     |
| 19. Treatment of animals by unqualified persons | <a href="#">/vn/unqualified</a>    |
| 20. Whistle-blowing                             | <a href="#">/vn/whistleblowing</a> |
| 21. Certification                               | <a href="#">/vn/certification</a>  |
| 22. Giving evidence for court                   | <a href="#">/vn/evidence</a>       |
| 23. Advertising and publicity                   | <a href="#">/vn/advertising</a>    |
| 24. Named Veterinary Surgeons                   | <a href="#">/vn/nvs</a>            |
| 25. Recognised veterinary practice              | <a href="#">/vn/recognised</a>     |
| 26. Working hours                               | <a href="#">/vn/workinghours</a>   |
| 27. Miscellaneous                               | <a href="#">/vn/miscellaneous</a>  |

The supporting guidance can also be accessed by scanning the following quick response (QR) code using a QR code scanner on a smart phone or tablet.



## General information

General information on the following topics may be accessed on the RCVS website by adding the corresponding short link to the RCVS web address, eg **www.rcvs.org.uk/education**.

Complaints	<a href="#">/complaints</a>
Education	<a href="#">/education</a>
Registration	<a href="#">/registration</a>
RCVS Practice Standards Scheme	<a href="#">/practicestandards</a>
Veterinary Nursing Bye-laws	<a href="#">/vnbyelaws</a>



