

DRAFT GUIDANCE

THE PROVISION OF 24-HOUR EMERGENCY COVER IN REMOTE REGIONS OF THE UK AND OTHER REGIONS WHERE THERE IS A LOW STOCK/ANIMAL DENSITY

In remote regions of the UK and other regions where there is a low stock/animal density of the relevant species, the RCVS accepts that there may be insufficient veterinary manpower for a veterinary surgeon “*in practice, to take steps to provide 24 hour emergency cover for the care of animals of those species treated by the practice during normal working hours*”.

In addition, the RCVS accepts that in such remote regions a veterinary surgeon “*on duty providing 24-hour emergency cover*” may not be able to provide immediate first aid or pain relief to all animals.

The RCVS annex to the Guide on 24-hour emergency cover provides that:

“27. In isolated communities there may be a need for a pragmatic approach to the provision of 24-hour emergency cover, provided that clients and the nearest veterinary practice are fully informed of the arrangements.”

When considering whether a veterinary surgeon’s *steps to provide 24- hour emergency cover* are reasonable and whether a veterinary surgeon is acting reasonably when *on duty providing 24-hour emergency cover*, the following non-exhaustive list of factors should be considered:

1) stock/animal density in the region;

(The lower the stock/animal density of the relevant species, the less likely that a region can support the veterinary manpower necessary to provide 24-hour emergency cover)

2) remoteness of the region

(The more remote or inaccessible the region, the more impracticable it may be to provide 24-hour emergency cover.)

3) proximity of other veterinary surgeons in practice in the region providing 24-hour emergency cover;

(In a remote area, where there is a veterinary practice providing 24-hour emergency cover, the RCVS is likely to expect other veterinary surgeons in practice in the region to provide 24-hour emergency cover. The availability of any dedicated provider of emergency services is likely to suggest that it is practicable to provide 24-hour emergency cover.)

4) co-operation between veterinary surgeons in practice to provide 24-hour emergency cover in the region;

(While such cooperation between veterinary surgeons is encouraged by the RCVS, it is not mandatory between what may be competitor practices. The RCVS annex to the Guide on 24-hour emergency cover states *“Veterinary surgeons are encouraged to cooperate with each other in the provision of 24-hour emergency cover. Such co-operation may be between groups of local practices. Alternatively, 24-hour emergency cover may be provided for a veterinary surgeon or practice by a dedicated 24-hour emergency service clinic. Arrangements must be made before an emergency arises, and normally confirmed in writing.”*)

5) veterinary services in the region are for a particular species

(In a remote area, if there are no or limited veterinary services for a particular species, the provision of veterinary services to that species without the provision of 24-hour emergency cover is more likely to be acceptable.)

6) whether animals are owned as part of a business

(It is more likely that a business will be able to consider alternative sources of veterinary services than a member of the public and be able to consider the risks and problems associated with the absence of a full veterinary service. The use of contracts specifying the terms of business is likely to avoid ambiguity about the provision those veterinary services, including 24-hour emergency cover.)

7) the business client's knowledge and experience of handling and caring for the animals

(The more knowledgeable and experienced the business client in handling and caring for the animals the more reasonable will be the provision of a limited 24-hour emergency cover in a remote area. In addition, the more likely that a veterinary surgeon will be able to leave veterinary medicines (not controlled drugs) with the business client for administration to animals under the prescribing veterinary surgeon's care and after his or her clinical assessment (see the guidance at Part 2,H of the Guide.))

8) compliance with the Working Time Regulations and Health and Safety legislation

(Veterinary surgeons are expected to comply with the Working Time Regulations and health and Safety legislation and therefore, for example, it may be impracticable for those in single-handed or small practices in remote regions of the UK to provide 24-hour emergency cover at all times.)

9) client/patient numbers

(The more clients and patients registered with a veterinary surgeon in practice, the more likely there will be sufficient veterinary manpower to support 24-hour emergency cover.)

10) distance between the veterinary surgeon in practice and the client/patient

(The greater the distance between the veterinary surgeon in practice and the client/patient, the more impracticable may be the provision of 24-hour emergency cover, and the more difficult it may be for a veterinary surgeon on duty providing that cover to respond to the needs of an animal that may require immediate first aid or pain relief.)

MARCH 2007