

VMD: Public Consultation on the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013

1. The following response is made on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS). The RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the UK. The role of the RCVS is to safeguard the health and welfare of animals committed to veterinary care through the regulation of the educational, ethical and clinical standards of veterinary surgeons and nurses, thereby protecting the interests of those dependent on animals, and assuring public health. It also acts as an impartial source of informed opinion on relevant veterinary matters.
2. As a regulatory body, the RCVS will limit its comments to those areas where there are clear indications of relevance to the College's role and where the new policy may require the VMD, the veterinary profession or the public to seek assistance from the College.
3. In the main the RCVS is supportive of the proposed changes to the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMRs). In the following response the RCVS highlights a number of areas where it lends particular support to proposals, has concerns, or requests further information on how the proposals will be implemented.

Change 3: Introduction of a clause to allow removal of a Veterinary Practice Premise (VPP) from the register

4. The RCVS is supportive of the clause introduced in the draft regulations that would allow for the removal of a VPP from the Register of VPPs where an inspection revealed 'significant breaches' of the VMRs. This removes an anomaly of the previous system and it is a positive step that under the draft regulation the VMD will be able to take action against VPPs that are not maintaining suitable standards.
5. Whilst the RCVS commends the VMD being given powers to remove VPPs from the Register, the RCVS has concerns that their effectiveness may be reduced if these powers are not accompanied by measures that would also prevent the same people who had been found to be breaching the VMRs from immediately opening and registering new premises.
6. The RCVS will be contacting the VMD following this consultation exercise to request a formal meeting to seek clarity as to how the powers to remove VPPs from the Register will be used and enforced, and to establish how this system will operate within the context of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme and the *Code of Professional Conduct*.

Change 14: Reduction to the fees applied by the RCVS for the registration of a VPP.

7. The RCVS commends the VMD for responding to its request to reduce the fee for the Registration of Veterinary Practice Premises from £40 to £34 and for including this reduction in the draft regulations. The Registration of Veterinary Practice Premises was introduced in 2009 and it was always the intention of the RCVS that the fee should be reviewed once the system was fully up and running.

Advertising of prescription products

8. The RCVS is concerned by the increased resistance developing to antimicrobials and anti-parasitic drugs, and considers that this is a priority issue for the profession to address.

9. Veterinary surgeons have an important role to play in maintaining the efficacy of antimicrobial drugs, by acting as 'gatekeepers' to such drugs and thereby ensuring that they are used appropriately, prudently and responsibly. The RCVS therefore commends the draft regulations for extending the ban on advertising antimicrobials to include 'professional keepers of animals'.
10. The RCVS is supportive of the fact that considerable advice is provided to veterinary surgeons regarding the restrictions on advertising in the accompanying 'Guidance Note Number 4: Controls on Advertising'.
11. The RCVS requests that the VMD gives consideration to how the changes to the restrictions on advertising could be communicated to the veterinary profession and how clarity could be brought to the advice, perhaps through the addition of example and case studies, in order to prevent veterinary surgeons accidentally falling foul of the restrictions.
12. The College is aware, for example, that many veterinary practices produce regular newsletters for their clients, which provide information on local animal health and welfare issues. Where localised resistance has developed, such newsletters may recommend the use of certain antimicrobials. Going forward, veterinary surgeons will need to exercise caution as to how such information is presented to clients in order to ensure that it falls under the exemptions for 'educational information' and is not deemed to be 'advertising'.
13. Veterinary surgeons are also involved in writing CPD articles and delivering lectures to animal owners and professional keepers, and these may be published or made available online. The RCVS seeks additional guidance as to how such materials, which are produced for educational purposes, should be treated, so as to ensure that they do not fall foul of the restrictions on advertising.

Price Lists and advertising

14. A new clause has been added to Guidance Note Number 4 that states:

'Price lists should consist of a list of all products belonging to a particular category e.g. all wormers or all vaccines. It is not acceptable to have a list of one product from several different categories e.g. one vaccine, one horse wormer, one sheep wormer etc.'

15. The RCVS considers that communication and clarification will again be required to ensure that veterinary surgeons are aware of and understand the proposed regulations governing price lists and advertising. Currently the RCVS has concerns that the guidance is overly complicated and ambiguous in places, and this could present compliance issues.
16. If clarification on the above comments is required, please do not hesitate to contact the College. Representatives from the RCVS would be happy to meet with officials to discuss and expand upon this evidence.