

## **RCVS Response to the DARD Consultations on the Welfare Codes of Practice for Rabbits, Horses and Non-Human Primates**

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 does not seek to comment on the detailed welfare aspects of the codes, but instead 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 Codes may require the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Northern Ireland, the veterinary profession or the public to seek assistance from the College.

### **Role of Welfare Codes of Practice**

3. The RCVS notes its strong support for the proactive approach taken by the NI Assembly and DARD to the development of secondary legislation and Welfare Codes of Practice under the Welfare of Animals Act (NI) 2011. Such Welfare Codes of Practice play a crucial role in ensuring that the legislation can achieve its potential to improve the health and welfare of animals and they assist in educating and informing the public as to how the welfare needs of their animals can be met.
4. Whilst commending the proactive approach taken by the NI Assembly to addressing welfare concerns and developing secondary legislation and welfare codes, the RCVS notes, however, a general concern that the lack of a UK-wide approach to animal welfare issues may serve to move animal welfare issues from one part of the country to another and may further increase public confusion as to welfare legislation and appropriate standards of animal welfare.

### **Contingency Planning**

5. The RCVS maintains that it is important on the grounds of ensuring the health and welfare of animals, that all animal owners and keepers make contingency plans, including ensuring that they are registered with an appropriate veterinary surgeon and that they understand their veterinary surgeon's system for the provision of out-of-hours veterinary care. RCVS guidelines require veterinary surgeons to take steps to provide out-of-hours cover for veterinary emergencies, and to inform their clients of such arrangements for emergency care. Nevertheless, the RCVS is aware of instances where owners have needed to seek emergency veterinary care for their animals, but have not been registered with a veterinary surgeon or been aware of their own veterinary surgeon's arrangements for out-of-hours care and in some instances this has led to complaints being made against veterinary surgeons.

6. The RCVS is pleased to note that the Welfare Code of Practice for Non-Human Primates states that 'keepers should be registered with a veterinary practice that has specialist knowledge of the species kept' and that the Code of Practice for Horses states that 'owners/keepers should have their vet's contact details easily available, including out of hours information'.
  
7. The RCVS considers, however, that it is important for all of the Codes to include a section that clearly advises owners to make such contingency plans and to make sure that they understand the out-of-hours system that their veterinary surgeon operates, so as to ensure that they are able to seek appropriate veterinary assistance for their animals in a timely fashion should an emergency occur.
  
8. 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 and Ministers to discuss and expand upon this statement.

RCVS  
February 2012