Welcome to

RCVS Open Day
2 May 2012

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Lifting the lid on the RCVS!
Setting veterinary standards: the College’s role

Dr Jerry Davies
President

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Straw poll: what’s our closest medical counterpart?

a) General Medical Council
b) Royal College of Surgeons
c) British Medical Association

• A: General Medical Council

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Myth-busting

- We are not a representative body
  - The British Veterinary Association
  - The British Veterinary Nursing Association

RCVS has a dual role

- **Regulator**, under Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA)
- **Royal College**, under Royal Charter 1844
- A complex organisation!
- Emphasis on 'setting veterinary standards'
  - Educational
  - Ethical
  - Professional
  - Clinical
Why?

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To safeguard the health and welfare of animals committed to veterinary care… thereby protecting the interests of those dependent on animals and assuring public health.

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Myth-busting

• We are not the Royal Veterinary College!
  – London University’s veterinary school
  – Both given Royal Charters within 30 years, with near-identical names!
Regulation, via the Register

• With some exemptions, only those on the RCVS Register can practise veterinary surgery in the UK

• We regulate how people get on it…
  …how they stay on it…
  and how they might get taken off it…!

Getting onto the Register

• Who can register?
• Setting standards of education
  – Seven UK veterinary schools – visitation system
  – Agreements with other countries – joint visitations
  – EU veterinary graduates – legal obligation to register
  – Other graduates – RCVS Statutory Membership Exam

What percentage of new registrants last year were overseas graduates?

46%
Staying on the Register

• Maintaining standards
  – Must actively keep up to date
    • 105 hours of continuing professional development over a three-year period for vets
    • 45 hours for registered veterinary nurses (RVNs)
    • Professional Development Phase compulsory for vets in their first year of practice
    • Period of Supervised Practice compulsory for RVNs who have been off the Register > five years
  – Abide by the Code of Professional Conduct – more later

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Leaving the Register

• Upholding standards
  – Statutory duty to consider all complaints made about vets (and, since last year, against registered veterinary nurses)
  – This may result in removal or suspension from the Register – more later

• Vets and RVNs can also remove themselves voluntarily

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Bogus vet / VN? Check online!

It does happen! RCVS has been involved with 63 investigations into breaches of VSA since Jan 2010 (56 vet; 7 VN)
‘Royal College’ role

- Awarding Fellowships, Diplomas and Certificates
- Maintaining Recognised Specialist List
  - Look on ‘Find a Vet’
- Awarding VN qualifications
- Registering / regulating veterinary nurses
- Source of opinion on veterinary matters relevant to our role

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RCVS Council composition

Council meetings are held in public

42 members

24 elected members
14 veterinary school representatives
4 Government appointees

How many lay members do you think there are?
- Nine in total, plus observers and members of our committees
RCVS Charitable Trust

- Grants
- Library and Information Service
  - Literature searches
  - Publications and books
  - Historic archives
  - Case histories
- Talk to the Trust team in the Members’ Room

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RCVS Honours

- Annual call for nominations each summer
  - RCVS honorary membership (non-members)
  - RCVS honorary fellowship (members)
  - Outstanding contributions to the veterinary sphere
- Also the VN Council’s Jubilee Award (closes 8 May) for outstanding contribution to the VN profession
- Awards presented at RCVS Day
- We would love to see more nominations from organisations like yours!

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New Codes of Professional Conduct

Gordon Hockey
Acting Registrar

The purpose of the Code

- Protecting animal health and welfare and the public
- Disciplinary Committee (DC) considers ‘serious professional misconduct’
- But by this stage, animals and their owners have been affected
- **Proactive** standard setting: the Code outlines ‘professional conduct’
Why new Codes?

• New Codes replaced old Guides in April
  – Shorter, principles-based
  – Better distinction between ‘must’ and ‘should’
  – Clearer and more accessible to the public
  – Consolidation of previous advice notes, annexes and guidance into one set of ‘supporting guidance’ - clarity

www.rcvs.org.uk/newcode

The structure (1)

• Five under-pinning principles
  1. Professional competence
  2. Honesty and integrity
  3. Independence and impartiality
  4. Client confidentiality and trust
  5. Professional accountability
The structure (2)

- Key points under six themes
- Veterinary surgeons and...
  1. Animals
  2. Clients
  3. The profession
  4. The veterinary team
  5. The RCVS
  6. The public

Vets and clients: Vets must...

- Be open and honest with clients and respect their needs and requirements
- Provide independent and impartial advice and inform a client of any conflict of interest
- Provide appropriate information to clients about the practice, including the cost of services and medicines
- Communicate effectively with clients and ensure informed consent is obtained before treatments or procedures are carried out

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Vets and clients (2): Vets must…

- Keep clear, accurate and detailed clinical and client records
- 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
- Respond promptly, fully and courteously to clients’ complaints and criticism

Supporting guidance

- 27 topics covered, including:
  - 24-hour emergency first aid and pain relief
  - Euthanasia
  - Practice information and fees
  - Communication and consent
  - Clinical and client records
  - Client confidentiality
What else is new?

- We have recently, with legal advice, reinterpreted aspects of the VSA to bring our regulation up to date
  - Health protocol
  - Performance protocol
  - Clinical governance

What does this mean for you?

- Reassurance that standards are being set and followed
- Broader jurisdiction than previously
- Please become familiar with the new Code so you can advise your members and stakeholders
Myth-busting

Your advice is just to help vets

No!

- The Code is there for the benefit of all
- Last year we received 8,085 calls requesting advice and 1,813 requests for written advice
- Of the latter, 940 were from non-vets and 873 from vets

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The Practice Standards Scheme: raising standards in practice

Peter Jinman
Vice-President

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Straw poll

• How many of you (before today) had heard of the Practice Standards Scheme or RCVS-accredited practices?

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What’s behind the logo?
What’s behind the logo?

• Under the Practice Standards Scheme, RCVS accredited practices have been inspected by independent vets against a set of robust criteria.
  • Every four years
  • Spot-checks in between
  • We look at the areas of the practice that you can’t!

Why was the Scheme needed?

• Back in 1966…
  – Number one on this day was?
    *Pretty Flamingo*, by Manfred Man
  – The Beatles were ‘more popular than Jesus’
  – Russia landed the first rocket on the moon
  – England won the World Cup
  – Veterinary nursing and other animal care professions were in their infancy
  – Most vet practices were owned and managed by vets

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Why was the Scheme needed? (2)

- We regulate vets on a statutory basis
- We don’t regulate practices
- Practice ownership and structures have changed since 1966!
- Scheme established in 2005 to offer quality assurance on areas such as:
  - Facilities & equipment
  - Management
  - Complaints procedures
  - Staff training
  - Health and safety

Who sets the standards?

- Scheme run by the Practice Standards Group
  - Includes representatives from all of the key veterinary and veterinary nursing organisations
  - Lay member on the Group
- Scheme administered by the RCVS
- ‘RCVS accredited practice’ badge is the public face of the Scheme
How does accreditation work?

- Practices can join in three categories
  - Core standards
  - General practice: at small animal, equine, farm animal or as emergency services clinic
  - Hospital: small animal or equine
- Or a combination of the above

What are the Standards?

- Core Standards include
  - 24-hour cover
  - Appropriately-trained staff
  - Cleanliness and hygiene
  - Checking and monitoring overnight patients
  - Itemised invoicing
  - Consent procedures
  - Basic diagnostic and surgical equipment
  - Client communication policy
GP standards

• Core Standards plus, amongst others:
  – Monitoring outcome of treatments
  – Ongoing commitment to education and training
  – Laboratory facilities for diagnostic testing
  – Clinical audit

• Additional standards as per species or discipline specification

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Hospital standards

• General Practice standards plus, amongst others:
  – Nursing staff 24/7
  – Vet available at all times for in-patients
  – Clinical audit
  – High quality and broad range of equipment eg ECG and ultrasound
  – Rigorous examination of premises and facilities, with emphasis on cleanliness and sterility

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What do inspectors look for?

- Standard operating procedures
  - Plus evidence they are being used
- Documents, certificates, records
- Facilities and equipment
  - Evidence they are being properly used and maintained

What’s the benefit to animal owners?

- High standards of facilities and equipment
- Commitment to staff and training
- Peace of mind for you and your animals
- Public health: correct storage of controlled drugs
Look for the logo

• Logos changed last year in-line with our rebranding – you may see both

Raising awareness

• Bookmarks available in accredited practices, and for use in rehoming centres, charity shops etc
  – Let us know if you would like some
• Recent adverts in cat, dog and horse-owner magazines
• What else can we do?
How can I find an accredited practice?

- Most will rely on word of mouth or their own experience
- Accredited Practice badge helps
  - New owners
  - Those looking to change practice
  - Those new to the area
- Scheme covers just under 50% of premises
  - Number of premises increases every year!
- Use www.findavet.org.uk to find an accredited practice near you

Find a vet

- You can find...
  - A practice near you
  - An accredited practice
  - A practice by name, location or postcode
  - An RCVS Recognises Specialist
  - A practice that treats a particular species
  - Practices that take student vets or VNIs for work experience/training
  - Certificate or diploma holders
Find a vet

Myth-busting

A practice where a vet is struck off loses its accreditation

No!

An unaccredited practice is no good

- It’s a voluntary Scheme – those not in the Scheme have not been inspected but should still meet Core Standards – new Code
- It’s the practice that is accredited; if one person is removed, it doesn’t follow that the whole practice should be penalised

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Veterinary nurses: their contribution to your animal’s health and welfare

Liz Branscombe
Chairman, Veterinary Nurses Council

Myth-busting

A veterinary nurse? When are you going to become a vet?

Ah, so you cuddle the cats and dogs?

Are you just a cheaper version of a vet?

I could do your job without any training!
Myth-busting

No!

- Veterinary nurses (VNs) are not mini-vets!
- Veterinary nursing is a profession developing in its own right, with rigorous training, a Register, its own code of conduct and disciplinary system

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Celebrating 50 years!

- 2011 marked 50 years since the start of VN training
- The profession has come a long way
  - Around 50% of practices now employ at least one qualified veterinary nurse*
  - On average a practice employs four*
- VNs play a valuable role in the practice team and are often to the fore when dealing with clients
Celebrating 50 years!

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Shape of the profession

- Currently 8,961 registered veterinary nurses plus 1,232 listed veterinary nurses (more on the difference later…)
  - 123 with equine qualifications
  - A mixed practice training pathway is available but no qualifiers yet
- 71% work in small animal / exotic practice*
- 24% work in mixed / equine / farm animal practice*
- Around 4,500 enrolled students
  - Approx 25% on degree courses, rest vocational
  - 10% already have a degree when they start VN training

*RCVS Survey of the Professions 2010
Can a veterinary nurse…

• Castrate a cat?
• Vaccinate a dog?
• Sign a vaccination certificate?
• Suture a wound on a horse?
• Extract cat’s teeth?
• Spay a cat?

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The answers…

• Can a veterinary nurse…
  – Castrate a cat? X
  – Vaccinate a dog? ✓ - under direction
  – Sign a vaccination certificate? X – but can document that it happened
  – Suture a wound? ✓
  – Extract teeth? ✓ - only if no tools required
  – Spay a cat? X

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The legal position

• The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 provides that qualified veterinary nurses who are listed with the RCVS can carry out medical treatment and minor surgery (not entering into a body cavity) under the direction of a veterinary surgeon
• Enrolled student nurses can do the same, as part of their training, under supervision
• But that’s only part of what a nurse is trained to do…

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What else can we do?

- Caring for hospitalised animals
- Dental hygiene work
- Taking radiographs
- Nutritional advice
- Puppy/kitten parties
- Senior pet advice
- In-house lab tests
- Monitoring anaesthesia
- Biosecurity
- Assisting with ultrasound
- Taking blood samples
- Teaching and supervising
- Practice administration
What's in a name?

• The title ‘veterinary nurse’ is not protected in law
  – any of you could call yourself VN
• The profession is pushing for protection
  – Sign the petition!
    http://epetitions.direct.gov.uk/petitions/18700
• Codes of Professional Conduct say:
  “Vets / VNs must ensure that tasks are delegated only to those who have the appropriate competence and registration”

Additional protection

• In 2007, the VN profession volunteered to establish a non-statutory Register
• Registered Veterinary Nurses (RVNs)
  – Abide by the Code of Conduct
  – Keep their skills and knowledge up to date
  – Are accountable for their professional practice via a disciplinary system
• Nearly 88% of eligible VNs have now registered
What next?

• Profession seeks statutory regulation
  – Protection of title
  – Allow us to remove someone for serious professional misconduct from List and Register

• Options being discussed – liaising with Defra

• Promotion of RVNs – new badge

• Helping the public to understand importance of training / accountability
  – Support BVNA’s VN Month - July

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Enforcing standards: how you can complain, and what we can do

Jacqui Molyneux
Vice-President

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Dealing with complaints

- We’ve talked about proactive regulation
- What happens when things go wrong?
- We have a duty to consider any complaint we receive
  - From the public
  - From vets
  - From veterinary nurses

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Around 700 complaints annually

Figure 11: Number and category of complaints and written requests for advice received
What can we consider?

• Specified under the Act
  – Serious professional misconduct
  – Criminal convictions that affect fitness to practise
  – Fraudulent registration

• As mentioned earlier, broadening jurisdiction
  – Health / performance protocols

The edge of our remit

Only if fees so high as to constitute SPM, or not properly communicated

Can only consider negligence if repeated or extreme – ie SPM
Sanctions

- VSA specifies sanctions at disciplinary hearing stage
  - Removal from Register (can apply for restoration after ten months, formal hearing required)
  - Suspension from Register – automatic restoration at end of period
  - Reprimand or warn as to future conduct
  - Postpone up to two years with undertakings

RCVS complaints procedure

1. Complaint received

2. Assessment
   - (90% of all complaints received progress to assessment)
   - Average time 8 days
   - Not progressed
     - (10% of all complaints received are not progressed by complainant)
   - No conduct issue
     - 30% of cases assessed are closed
   - No arguable case
     - 40% of cases examined are closed

3. Case examination
   - Average time 13 weeks

4. Preliminary Investigation Committee
   - Average time 15/18 weeks

5. Disciplinary Committee
   - (Formal and public 2%)
Formal setting of the DC

Myth-busting

You always side with the vets! It’s a stitch-up!

Can you tell me about a complaint against vet XX?

Can you get me compensation?

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Myth-busting

- It's a fair process
  - 50:50 lay people and vets on the DC
  - Lay observers on PIC
- We can’t award compensation
- Complaints remain confidential unless they reach DC

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Top ten areas of complaint

1. No one said ‘sorry’
2. Euthanasia ‘going wrong’
3. Consent forms not signed
4. Death under anaesthetic
5. Home visits
6. Out-of-hours cover
7. Pre-purchase examinations (equine)
8. Referrals – lack of explanation
9. Overnight supervision – not what client expected
10. False certification

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Moving forward

- The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966
- Regulatory environment has changed significantly
- Members of the committees that set the rules, investigate complaints and adjudicate are all drawn from the same pool (Council)
- Council is predominantly made up of vets
- Number of days DC required to sit increasing – ie 34 in 2007 to a projected 67 this year (excluding RVN)
- Cases becoming more complicated

Towards a solution?

- In 2010, we asked Defra for a legislative reform order to allow the disciplinary committees to be constituted independently of Council
  - Greater independence
  - Formally bring lay persons into process
  - Improve flexibility – speed up the process
  - Larger pool to draw upon
  - Limit on term of office
- Would be a transition period
- Formal consultation closed 10 April