

Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons

2012

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Preface

How to use this Code

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


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 '/evidence', then type **www.rcvs.org.uk/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/vetcode**. 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**.

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**).

Introduction

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) is responsible for overseeing the education of UK veterinary students; the registration of UK veterinary graduates and overseas veterinary surgeons; and, the fitness to practise (conduct, health and performance) of veterinary surgeons. Only those appropriately registered with the RCVS have the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK.

The RCVS regulates veterinary surgeons in accordance with the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, to protect the public interest and to safeguard animal health and welfare.

Declaration on admission to the profession

Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. For this reason, on admission to membership of the RCVS, and in exchange for the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK, every veterinary surgeon 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 surgeons' professional responsibilities. Supporting guidance provides further advice on the proper standards of professional practice. The Code and supporting guidance are essential for veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons may be presented with a dilemma. In such situations, veterinary surgeons should balance the professional responsibilities, having regard first to animal welfare.

Principles of practice

Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons have professional responsibilities in the following areas:

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

1. Veterinary surgeons and animals

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

2. Veterinary surgeons and clients

- 2.1 Veterinary surgeons must be open and honest with clients and respect their needs and requirements.
- 2.2 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons 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 surgeons 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 surgeons must keep clear, accurate and detailed clinical and client records. [13. Clinical and client records]
- 2.6 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons must respond promptly, fully and courteously to clients' complaints and criticism.

3. Veterinary surgeons and the profession

- 3.1 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons 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 surgeons must maintain and develop the knowledge and skills relevant to their professional practice and competence, and comply with RCVS requirements on the Professional Development Phase (PDP) and continuing professional development (CPD).

[\[!\[\]\(ec9132f1d27c8919987d92907322654d_img.jpg\) Education\]](#)

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

- 3.5 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons and the veterinary team

- 4.1 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons 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 surgeons must maintain minimum practice standards equivalent to the Core Standards of the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme.

[\[!\[\]\(830769b31eeeaca920791081939ff8ba_img.jpg\) RCVS Practice Standards Scheme\]](#)

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

[\[20. Whistle-blowing\]](#)

5. Veterinary surgeons and the RCVS

- 5.1 Veterinary surgeons must be appropriately registered with the RCVS.

[ [Registration](#)]

- 5.2 Veterinary surgeons must provide the RCVS with their PDP and CPD records when requested to do so.

[ [Education](#)] [ [Registration](#)]

- 5.3 Veterinary surgeons, and those applying to be registered as veterinary surgeons, 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 surgeons, and those applying to be registered as veterinary surgeons, 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](#)]

6. Veterinary surgeons and the public

- 6.1 Veterinary surgeons 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 surgeons must certify 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 surgeons promoting and advertising veterinary products and services must do so in a professional manner.

[\[23. Advertising and publicity\]](#)

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

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

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	/complaints
Education	/education
Registration	/registration
RCVS Practice Standards Scheme	/practicestandards

