RCVS SETTING VETERINARY STANDARDS

LAY READER REVIEW GUIDELINES

The lay reader should put themselves in the place of an owner/keeper of an animal who is being asked to consent to a clinical veterinary treatment or research on their pet. The two important elements for review in such applications are the objective(s) of the research and, secondly, the actual process, that is, what will be involved for themselves as owners and their pet. That means that the details of the procedures to be carried out on the animal assume key importance rather than the reasons why they are being carried out (that is dealt with by other members of the ERP).

The two key documents for review are the Information Sheet and the Consent Form. It is usually accepted that the readability of the prose should be pitched at the level of an 18-year-old with average intelligence and with some experience of pet animals. Clinical phrases and technical jargon should be avoided or explained in simple language. This means that the lay reader does not have to read or understand the whole application but only to concentrate on the Information Sheet and the Consent Form.

It may be helpful to imagine that you are going to your own doctor or consultant and having similar things explained to you. To that approach could be added that it could be you acting as a proxy for an elderly relative or your child for which you have responsibility.

INFORMATION SHEETS

A good Information sheet should include the following points.

Context: Why is the research being done?

Aims: The objectives should be clearly stated for a lay audience, including what the applicants hope to find?

Strategy: Describe clearly what is actually going to be done to your pet throughout the project, and how this is different from normal conventional practice. Explain briefly, the design of the work e.g. randomisation and timelines.

Impact: An explanation of how achieving the objectives will benefit the pet animal or other animals. In addition, the risks of potential harms should be stated and how these compare with conventional treatment. This should include some information on what might go wrong and how that will be treated e.g. stop work, withdraw from the study, rescue therapies.

Alternative treatments: Are these laid out clearly so that the owner has clear choices.

Extra costs: Set out any extra costs involved in the work that would not normally be part of the conventional treatment, and how these will be covered.

An Information sheet should **AVOID**:

- detailed veterinary technical explanations of the disease;
- unnecessary jargon, abbreviations and technical terms and if they have to be used there is a clear explanation; and
- long sentences - sentences short and simple, e.g. less than 25 words.

The example of a Lay Summary (see *An example of a Summary in Lay Language* on the RCVS ERP Guidance) may help.

Out of interest ONLY: Readability scores can be calculated online e.g. with the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level (FKGL), Flesch Reading Ease (FRE), Gunning-Fog Index (GFI), Coleman-Liau (CLI), and Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG) tests, an online calculator. FKGL and FRE tests both utilize the average sentence length and average syllables per word whereas GFI assesses average sentence length and the use of polysyllabic words. CLI calculates the average number of letters per 100 words and the average sentence length. SMOG evaluates number of polysyllabic words in 3 ten-sentence samples.

CONSENT FORMS

A good consent form should include the following.

- Be specific for the work to be done and clearly relate to the Information Sheet
- Should specify each step that requires owner consent and provide the option of stating/ticking YES or NO.
- Clearly set out each of the alternative options available to the owner/keeper and provide the option of stating/ticking YES or NO. Perhaps request a "More information required" option to make sure the client has been completely informed to their satisfaction.
- Set out any extra costs involved in the work that would not normally be part of the conventional treatment, and how these will be covered.
- A statement that compliance with GDPR/DPA for personal data will be followed and such data if not anonymised (pseudonymised) will be destroyed at the time of publication or within 5 years whichever is the sooner.
- Any samples or test results or anonymised scientific data may be kept for future treatment research.

Consent forms should avoid:

- Details of any practice payment options for treatment
- Technical details so it is written clearly in lay language

TRAINING

The Panel Chair will provide half to one day's training at a mutually convenient time. There is also an annual meeting when any concerns can be aired and further updates discussed.

WORKLOAD and RESPONSE TIMES

We expect the normal workload to be 1 to 2 applications a week, varying between 0 and 3 depending on holidays and the number of applications coming into the Panel. It would be helpful if you would let us know times when you will be unavailable for reviewing. We expect a turnround time of 7- 10 working days whenever possible.