

RCVS ERP guidance on writing lay summaries

The RCVS Ethics Review application form (Section 2) requires a maximum 500 word lay summary of the proposed research for a non-scientific audience. The summary is of key importance to the non-veterinary “lay” members of the Ethics Review Panel who use it to assess the merits of the proposal. The lay summary will also be made available to the public via the RCVS website 12 months after approval has been granted unless specifically agreed otherwise. The summary should be aimed at the general public and written in plain English. The use of jargon should be avoided and any technical terms that do need to be used should be explained.

Our lay panel members have consistently reported that lay summaries submitted have included language and assumed knowledge that is inappropriately technical for a lay summary. This guidance has therefore been constructed by the Panel to offer an example of how a fictional, relatively technical summary might be converted into an appropriate lay summary.

The structure of the revised summary below is only intended for guidance, but may be useful both for the authors and the reader.

Original “lay” summary

Canine idiopathic epilepsy (IE) is a condition which is estimated to affect 0.6% of dogs visiting UK veterinary practices. It is more prevalent in specific breeds of dog such as border collies, beagles and boxers, than it is in cross breed dogs. IE is diagnosed when extensive arrays of test do not identify a cause. Dogs with IE can suffer focal or generalised seizures. During generalized seizures, the dogs become unconscious and often stiffen and paddle their legs. In focal seizures, they may just have aberrant movements of a specific, focal body part. Affected dogs are normal *inter-actually*. The prognosis for dogs affected by IE is variable, with those experiencing seizures from a young age, cluster seizures and prolonged *status epilepticus* most likely to be euthanised at an early age.

This study aims to investigate a novel therapeutic, “FitStop” for dogs with IE, characterising its efficacy in seizure frequency and severity, and the incidence of adverse events. We will recruit dogs from within the UK who meet specific inclusion criteria, such as being on monotherapy and meeting the internationally recognised Tier 1 confidence level for canine IE. Dogs enrolled on the study will be given the novel therapeutic alongside their existing medication, and therapeutic monitoring will be performed at serial time points, alongside a validated client specific outcome measure.

Revised lay summary

What is the problem?

We want to find out if a new treatment called FitStop will help dogs with idiopathic epilepsy. Idiopathic epilepsy is when dogs have seizures, or fits, and we don’t know why. It can affect any dog but is most common in certain pure-breed dogs like border collies, beagles and boxers. There are two types of idiopathic epilepsy in dogs. The first type is where the dog has a classical “fit”, becoming unresponsive with paddling legs. In the second type, you may just see an individual body part such as one leg moving unusually. The rest of the time the dogs seem perfectly normal.

Why is it important?

We know that some dogs with idiopathic epilepsy will not live as long as they would without the condition. Having idiopathic epilepsy when they are young, having multiple fits back-to-back, or that go on for a long time makes an early death more likely. The study will help us find out how well FitStop works in managing how many times and how badly the dog fits. It will also tell us if it causes any side effects.

What do we plan to do?

Fifty dogs who have idiopathic epilepsy will be given FitStop for three months. Dogs that can take part need to be on just one veterinary treatment and need to have had tests that would tell us if there is another reason the dog has fits. The dogs will take the FitStop tablets for three months as well as the medications they are already on.

Vets will perform blood tests and check the dogs at visits to the clinics. There will be three visits and you won't be charged for these blood tests or the FitStop tablets. We also want owners to complete questionnaires to tell us about how the dogs are doing at home.

What will we do with the results?

We hope to publish/present/prepare internal guidance/conduct further research etc but the identity of all those who responded will remain anonymous.

Who are we?

We are a team of specialist veterinary neurologists (neurologists diagnose and treat problems with the brain and nervous system) and we have a lot of experience in canine epilepsy diagnosis and its management.