

GUIDELINE 11

VETERINARY MEDICAL RECORDS

Registered veterinary practitioners should ensure they are familiar with the contents of this Guideline. The Board considers this Guideline to be the minimum standard expected from a registered veterinary practitioner exercising reasonable skill and care in the course of providing treatment to animals.

Practitioners should read this Guideline in conjunction with the Definitions listed in the introductory pages.

11.1 VETERINARY MEDICAL RECORDS

11.1.1 Veterinary medical records are an important tool in the practice of veterinary medicine. They serve as a basis for planning patient care, and as a means of communication between members of the clinic staff. They furnish documentary evidence of the patient's illness, care and treatment. They serve as a basis for review, study and evaluation of medical care rendered by the clinic. They form an essential record of restricted drugs used or supplied, and the basis for their supply.

11.1.2 A veterinary medical record may be handwritten on client cards or entered and stored as a computer record. They must be readily retrievable, legible and a complete record of all consultation between animal patient or herd / flock, owner and veterinary practitioner. Veterinary records must contain sufficient information to justify the diagnosis and treatment of the animals or herd / flock concerned. In the case of a herd or flock, the record should contain sufficient information to identify the herd / flock concerned, the problem under consideration, record all investigation results and treatments prescribed.

11.1.3 Copies of any certificate issued should be retained as part of the animal's clinical records (see Guideline 5.1.1).

11.1.4 The veterinary medical records of each patient should provide the following history data:

- i) client identification;
- ii) date treated;
- iii) animal patient or herd identification;
- iv) medical history;
- v) physical examination details;
- vi) provisional and final diagnosis;
- vii) treatment given, dispensed or prescribed (see Guideline 6.5.6.4);
- viii) vaccination record;
- ix) copy of any certificate issued (see Guideline 5.1.1)

and, where relevant:

- i) prognosis;
- ii) consultation progress notes;
- iii) radiographic reports;
- iv) imaging reports e.g. CAT, MRI, Ultrasound, ECG, EEG, Scintigraphy

- v) laboratory reports;
- vi) autopsy reports;
- vii) specialist reports
- viii) surgical record;
- ix) surgical mortality record;
- x) anaesthetic record;
- xi) dental record;
- xii) hospitalisation treatment record

11.1.5 Veterinary medical records are required to satisfy the requirements of various legislation including the Veterinary Practice Act 1997, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 and Regulations 2004, and the Drugs, Poisons & Controlled Substances Act 1981 and Regulations 2006 or any subsequent amendments to the abovementioned legislation.

11.1.6 All veterinary medical records are the property of the clinic and maintained in the clinic for the benefit of the client, the animal, the staff and the clinic. Veterinary medical records should be confidential and no information in these records should be released to anyone without clear authorization from the owner of the particular animal, other than to those persons legally authorized to request them. See 11.5, also 15.3

11.1.7 Objective comments re an animal's temperament may be included e.g. nervous, aggressive, fear biter, etc, however subjective personal comments about clients or animals should be avoided.

11.1.8 In the case of a stray, medical records should be kept identifying as best as possible the animal and the procedure. See 10.3 and 10.4.1

11.2 RETENTION OF MEDICAL RECORDS

11.2.1 The length of time veterinary medical records must be kept is not stated in Law. Should legal action be brought against a registered veterinary practitioner, all documentary evidence would be brought to account. In that case it can be considered that veterinary medical records would be needed in defence. Records must be held for a minimum of three (3) years to comply with Drugs & Poisons legislation and should (for the purposes of defence) be held for at least seven (7) years after the last occasion on which the animal received treatment.

11.3 CLIENT ENTITLEMENT TO THE RECORDS OF THEIR ANIMALS

11.3.1 Recent Court decisions have ruled that it is not a legal requirement to provide copies of the clinical record to the client. However sufficient information to allow for on-going or future treatment should be provided to the client. Where a request is made, veterinarians should supply a history to another veterinarian who may be providing an opinion or treatment.

11.3A Transfer of Records to another Veterinarian

Whether the request to forward veterinary medical records is made by the client or the second veterinarian, this request should be treated professionally and actioned as quickly as possible by the first veterinarian. When a medical record is transferred and a copy is not retained (i.e. radiographs), a note should be made of the name and address of where the information was transferred.

11.4 SALE TRANSFER OR CLOSURE OF A PRACTICE

11.4.1 In the event of a sale, transfer or closure of a practice, the practitioner must decide what to do with the medical records they hold. They can elect to sell, transfer, retain or hand the information directly to the client. The practitioner is obliged to notify clients of what is going to be done with their animal's records:

- a) publish a notice in a local newspaper. In the case of metropolitan practices, publication in a metropolitan newspaper in addition to a local newspaper is recommended. The notice should set out the details of the proposed changes in the practice and state whether the records are to be retained by the practitioner, transferred to another practitioner or made available to the clients;
- b) place a notice in the practice. A written notice should be placed in a prominent location in the practice for a period of not less than two months prior to the date of the changes in the practice;
- c) clients with animals currently receiving a course of treatment, therapy, or being monitored by the practice, should be sent notification in writing about the changes to the practice.

11.4.2 Practitioners who elect to retain medical records must comply with the requirements set out in 11.2.

11.4.3 Practitioners should consider in their succession and estate planning, provision for the medical records they hold.

11.5 RELEASE OF RECORDS FOR INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINT AND / OR LEGAL ACTION

11.5.1 The Board can demand to see all pertinent records as part of a complaint investigation.

11.5.2 The Board is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (FOI Act) and, upon receipt of an application for access under FOI, would make a decision according to the provisions of that Act. Whilst there are exemption provisions under the FOI Act, as each request for access is different, each request is treated on an individual basis. The Board cannot provide further general information in regard to what may or may not be released.

11.5.3 Demands for information regarding the owner of an animal, by the driver of the vehicle which hit it, following a hit-by-car incident should be referred to the local police station.

11.5.4 The Courts have power to require any information that they see fit. This includes any information demanded by warrant or subpoena by a police officer, inspectors of the RSPCA, Drugs & Poisons Regulation Group (Department of Human Services) and Department of Primary Industries. Registered veterinary practitioners have a duty to comply with such lawful requests promptly and efficiently.