

GUIDELINE 14

REGISTERED SPECIALISTS AND SPECIALIST PRACTICE STANDARDS

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.

14.1 PREAMBLE

Registered Veterinary Specialists are veterinary practitioners who have been registered as specialists by the veterinary board in the jurisdiction in which they practice. They have demonstrated the required levels of specialised training, qualifications, experience and expertise in order to have been granted endorsement as a specialist.

A Non-Specialist referral veterinary practitioner is any registered veterinary practitioner who accepts referrals from other practitioners, or who provides particular services in different locations to clients who are primarily clients of another registered veterinary practitioner. (Also see 6.4.3)

Any practitioner who does not hold endorsement as a veterinary specialist should refer to themselves as a "Professional Interest Practitioner in [name of interest]" – for example *"Professional Interest Practitioner in Dermatology"*.

Members of the public may find it difficult to determine if a veterinary practitioner is a registered specialist or not, and it is important to avoid any situation that can lead to confusion or misleading of the public concerning the specialist status of a practitioner.

14.2 REGISTERED VETERINARY SPECIALISTS

14.2.1 In the public interest and to ensure users of veterinary services are in a position to compare and make informed decisions about those services, the Veterinary Practice Act 1997 (the Act) in Sections 57(4) and (5) sets out clear provisions with respect to registered veterinary specialists.

14.2.2 Irrespective of a registered veterinary practitioner's qualification, training or experience, the practitioner must not:

- claim to be qualified as a veterinary specialist; or
- claim to be registered as a veterinary specialist; or
- take or use the title of veterinary specialist, or act in any way to induce a belief by others that he/she is a veterinary specialist

unless the practitioner is holding current specialist endorsement of registration with

the Board in a particular branch of veterinary practice.

If they are provided to the referring clinic, all clients should receive a copy of the general information leaflet provided by the specialist or referral practice to enable them to adequately prepare for their visit to the clinic

14.2.3 A registered veterinary specialist whose registration is endorsed in one specialist branch of veterinary practice must not claim to be qualified or registered as a specialist in any other branch of veterinary practice.

14.2.4 Registered veterinary practitioners must conduct themselves and their practices (including advertising), at all times in a manner which ensures the public, and other practitioners, clearly understand their registered status, including whether or not they have been endorsed by the Board as veterinary specialists.

14.2.5 Registered veterinary specialists who carry out mobile (visiting) practices must practice exclusively in premises that meet the requirements for them to carry out their work with due diligence and appropriate patient care, consistent with specialist treatment or services.

14.3 CPD FOR REGISTRATION AS A VETERINARY SPECIALIST

14.3.1 Registered Veterinary Specialists are expected to maintain a superior knowledge of current veterinary practice in their area of speciality, by any or all of the following means:

- publications in international and local referred journals;
- presentations at international or local veterinary conferences;
- supervision and training of registered veterinary practitioners undergoing training programmes or for general skills updating.

Guideline 13 elaborates responsibilities relating to participation in CPD.

14.4 SPECIALIST AND REFERRAL PRACTICES

14.4.1 In view of the provisions of the Act (as set out in 14.2.2 above) the Board has determined the following guidelines with respect to the operation of specialist and referral practices.

14.4.2 Specialist and referral practices must comply with Guideline 1.

14.4.3 Unless all veterinary practitioners working out of a practice are registered veterinary specialists, or are undergoing a recognised specialist training programme under the direct supervision of a registered veterinary specialist, the trading name of the practice may not contain the word "specialist" or any derivation of it. A practice where non-specialists take referrals without the direct supervision of a registered veterinary specialist may, however, be designated as a Referral Centre.

14.4.4 Specialist and referral practices should provide an information board within the public area, which lists all practitioners working at or from the premises, and clearly states their registered status.

- 14.4.5 All practitioners, who are not registered veterinary specialists, accepting referral work within any practice must make it clear to clients or potential clients and referring practitioners that they are not registered veterinary specialists.
- 14.4.6 Specialists and referral practices should ensure that clients are aware of the cost of any procedure for which they have been referred. Any quote or cost estimate given should be recorded in the patient records and should be adhered to as closely as possible. If major deviations from a given quote or estimate become necessary, the client should be informed, and an agreement reached and recorded, before additional procedures are undertaken.
- 14.4.7 Specialist and referral practices should provide a copy of any consent form signed by the person presenting the animal to the centre, to that person.
- 14.4.8 Registered veterinary specialists and referral veterinarians have a responsibility to communicate their procedures, findings, and details of any treatments given, to the referring registered veterinary practitioner. At the end of the veterinary specialist's or referral veterinarian's involvement in the case, the animal and client must be formally referred back to the regular veterinarian, and full details of treatment and after care expected would be provided to the regular veterinarian.
- 14.5 **REFERRAL TO SPECIALIST OR REFERRAL PRACTICES**
- 14.5.1 Veterinarians referring work to other registered veterinary practitioners must ensure the owner of the animal clearly understands whether the veterinarian to whom the animal is referred is, or is not, a registered veterinary specialist.
- 14.5.2 If the specialist or referral practice has provided information leaflets to the referring clinic, the referring veterinarian should ensure that all clients being referred receive a copy to enable them to adequately prepare for their visit to the specialist or referral clinic.
- 14.5.3 Every effort should be made to obtain a general costs estimate for the procedure before referral. The estimate should be discussed with the client when treatment options are discussed and before the referral is finalised. The client should be reminded to discuss these costs again with the specialist or referral centre before the procedure is commenced.