



Newsletter

Veterinary Board of the Northern Territory

CS Robinson Building, Berrimah Farm, Berrimah NT
GPO Box 3000, DARWIN, Northern Territory 0801
Email: vetboard@nt.gov.au Phone: 08 89992028
Web: www.vetboard.nt.gov.au Fax: 08 89992089

September 2015

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Position	Name
President	Dr Malcolm Anderson
Vice President	Dr Ian Gurry
Member	Dr Shane Bartie
Member	Dr Elizabeth Stedman
Public Interest Member	Marion Davey
Administrative Support (Board Registrar)	Sue Gillis

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WELCOME TO NEW AND EXISTING BOARD MEMBERS

The Board is pleased to announce the re appointment of Dr Ian Gurry and Dr Shane Bartie as members of the Board until 2018 and also welcomes Dr Elizabeth Stedman who was also appointed to the Board to replace Dr Dick Morton who retired earlier this year. The Board acknowledges the significant contribution Dr Morton made to the Veterinary Board and we wish him well in his retirement.

Next Board Meeting date is: 19 November 2015

FEE INCREASE

The Board wishes to advise of a fee increase from 1 July 2015. The fees are as follows:

- | | |
|---|----------|
| - New fee for Primary Registration | \$172.00 |
| - Renewal for Primary Registration | \$115.00 |
| - Renewal for Specialist Primary Registration | \$287.00 |
| - All Secondary Registration | \$Nil |



ANNUAL REGISTRATION RENEWAL 2016

Registration renewals will be posted out on 31 October 2015. Please ensure that the Registrar has your correct postal address. You can update your address by either email at Vetboard@nt.gov.au or facsimile on (08) 8999 2089.

THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING CONTEMPORARY PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF VETERINARY SCIENCE

Although the current legislation does not mandate continuing professional development (CPD) or link it to the annual renewal of veterinary registration process, registered veterinarians have a duty under the Northern Territory Veterinarians Act and Code of Conduct prescribed in the Regulations to maintain contemporary professional standards of veterinary science.

Sections 28(1)(a) and 28(2) of the Veterinarians Act, provide that a registered veterinarian is taken to be incompetent in or connection with the provision of a veterinary service if he or she is unable or fails to uphold or maintain contemporary professional standards.

In addition, the Code of Conduct requires at clause 4(1) that "A registered veterinarian must maintain knowledge of the current standards of practice of veterinary surgery or veterinary medicine in the areas of veterinary science relevant to his or her practice"

It is therefore essential that veterinarians actively seek to keep abreast of new advances and current standards of veterinary science in their chosen field of veterinary practice.

Northern Territory registered veterinarians need to take note that Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is already mandatory in most other jurisdictions in Australia and will need to be included in proposed amendments to the Northern Territory Veterinarians Act in the interest of:

- (1) achieving consistency and uniformity in Veterinary Board requirements across all States and Territories (which is an important part of the national recognition of veterinary registration process); and
- (2) meeting community expectations and maintaining consumer confidence in the veterinary profession.

The Code of Professional Conduct promulgated by the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA), which is relevant to all veterinarians, includes the following:

Guiding Principle Number 7 -

Maintain and continue to enhance your professional knowledge and skills -

Continuing veterinary education and the advancement of knowledge are fundamental to the role of the professional. Failure to keep informed about relevant advances in veterinary science is a dereliction of this responsibility. Continuing education may include attendance at meetings and conferences, reading of journals, interaction with colleagues, publication of papers, and the education and professional development of new graduates, veterinary nurses and veterinary students.

AVBC: VET ACCREDITATION NOW RECOGNISED BY THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Effective July 1, 2015, the United States Department of Education (USDE) will recognise AVBC accreditation standards and processes. The AVBC accredits veterinary schools on behalf of all the veterinary registration boards of Australia and New Zealand.

AVBC Chair Dr Robert Cassidy said that this is good news for U.S. students attending veterinary schools in the region as they can now be assured of their eligibility to participate in U.S. federal student aid programs. Taking up the opportunity to be recognised has also been a great opportunity for AVBC to be benchmarked against international best practice.

“This intense scrutiny of our processes should give Australian and New Zealand graduates confidence that the accreditation of their degrees is aligned with the most rigorous systems in the world. “

The American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education (AVMA CoE) and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) have also undergone the USDE recognition process and they received letters of recognition at the same time as AVBC.

EMERGENCY ANIMAL DISEASE (EAD) ALERTS

Do you know where to find national animal disease alerts?

The Australian Department of Agriculture regularly releases EAD alerts and bulletins for private practitioners. These alerts can be found at: www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/pests-diseases-weeds/animals/ead-bulletin.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH INFORMATION FOR VETERINARIANS

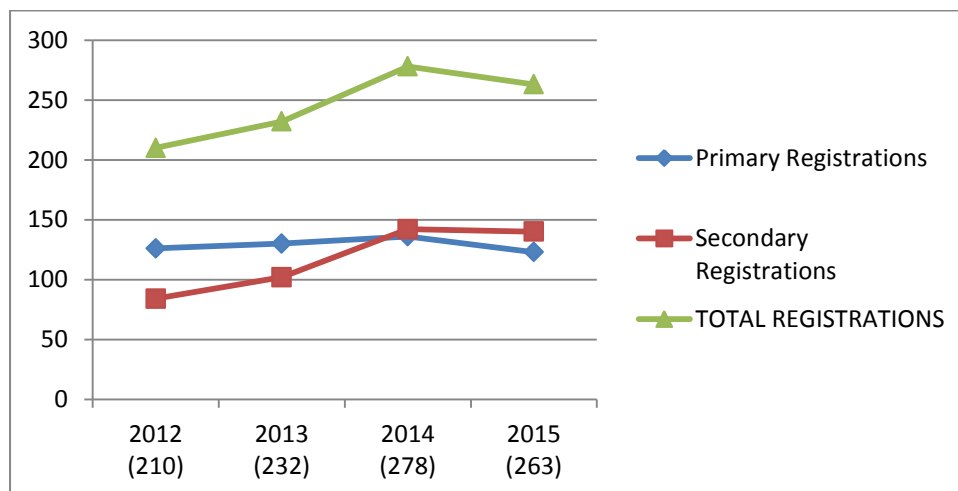
The Department of Health now has an informative website page for Veterinarians. Veterinarians are encouraged to read the ‘Veterinarians and scheduled substances’ factsheet, which is a good reminder of regulations and responsibilities regarding scheduled substances. The website link is:

http://www.health.nt.gov.au/Environmental_Health/Medicines_and_Poisons_Control/Veterinarians/

The link will also be placed onto the Vet Board’s webpage.

REGISTRATION STATS

The graph below is an indication of all registrations since 2012 in both Primary and Secondary classifications. As you can see, currently there has been a decrease in Primary registrations in the NT in 2015 to (123) compared to 2014 of (136) with only a slight decrease in Secondary registrations in 2015 (140) from (142) in 2014.



COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED AND DETERMINED BY THE BOARD

The Board has a statutory obligation to investigate written complaints regarding a veterinarian's professional or ethical conduct.

Section 28 of the *Veterinarians Act* defines misconduct as follows:

"28. Meaning of misconduct

(1) For the purposes of this Act, a registered veterinarian or a person formerly registered under this Act is guilty of misconduct if he or she –

(a) is guilty of improper or unethical conduct, or is incompetent or negligent, in or in connection with the provision of a veterinary service;

(b) contravenes or fails to comply with this Act, a prescribed code of conduct or a condition to which his or her registration is subject; or

(c) uses in connection with the provision of veterinary services a qualification or title relating to his or her competence to provide such services that is not shown in his or her entry in the Register.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1)(a), a registered veterinarian or a person formerly registered under this Act is taken to be incompetent if he or she is unable or fails to uphold or maintain contemporary professional standards.

SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES OF COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATED AND DETERMINED IN 2015

Case 1

Complaint: reimbursement of costs for failed surgery of a broken leg in a dog, and costs associated with subsequent amputation of the leg. The complainant alleged lack of due care and skill by the veterinarian, unprofessional business documentation and uncourteous communication.

Background: A working dog was diagnosed with a fractured femur, and the fracture was surgically reduced by Dr X using a plate and screw technique. After one month the fixation became unstable, and the leg was subsequently successfully amputated.

Decision: An investigation by the Board found that the current standards of record keeping, staff supervision and training at the clinic were adequate. Clinical records showed the complainant elected for Dr X to perform the surgery despite recommendations for referral to an orthopaedic specialist, and surgical complications, including surgical failure due to the complexity of the fracture, had been clearly explained. The complainant was also informed in writing of the need for strict rest post-surgery. The Board determined clinic operations met contemporary professional standards and complied with the Code of Conduct prescribed in the Veterinary Regulations and the complaint was dismissed.

Case 2

Complaint re: Unsatisfactory competence and ethics of the treatment of a dog for desexing in a remote aboriginal community.

Background: The vet involved was conducting desexing of dogs in an aboriginal community as requested by the local council. The complaint was lodged over the competence and ethics the vet displayed while working in the community.

Decision: The Board's investigation into whether the vet adhered to the *Veterinarians Act*, Regulations, Code of Conduct found that overall the veterinary treatment provided in the

circumstances was consistent with veterinary standards in remote communities and complied with the governing legislation and contemporary standards of veterinary practice. The complaint was dismissed.

Case 3

Complaint: reimbursement of all vet bills related to the failed desexing of a bitch, and subsequent death of one of the complainants male dogs.

Background: The complainant alleged that the death of one of their male dogs was the direct result of a failed desexing operation of one their bitches. The bitch in question had been routinely spayed by Clinic 1 two years previously. After a number of fights between the complainant's male dogs, which resulted in the death of one dog, Clinic 2 examined the female, found her to be in heat, and subsequently removed ovarian tissue during a second surgery.

Decision: An investigation by the Board acknowledged the finding of apparent ovarian tissue, but determined that remnant ovarian tissue is a recognised complication of ovariohysterectomy. Clinic 1 was found to have a satisfactory policy for handling such complications, which would have resolved the problem had the clinic been notified of the issue by the complainant. Clinical records showed no communication with the complainant and Clinic 1 after the surgery, and a routine follow-up consultation had been missed by the complainant. The client history kept by Clinic 1 also suggested inter-dog aggression had been occurring between the complainant's dogs for some time prior to the desexing surgery.

Alleged consequential events of veterinary acts are outside the scope of the Board's deliberations on potential negligence. The complaint was dismissed.

HOW CAN VETERINARIANS AVOID ADVERSE EVENTS AND COMPLAINTS?

Despite best efforts, adverse events do occur and complaints are an inevitable part of veterinary practice. However, the way veterinarians practise can influence the likelihood of complaints and the way complaints are dealt with can reduce the risks of them escalating to the Veterinary Board.

Adverse events and complaints are reduced when veterinarians:

- Perform a thorough examination.
- Collect a good history.
- Keep detailed and accurate records.
- Communicate well so that clients understand the information given and are fully informed of the treatment options, risks and estimated costs.
- Ensure the client's informed consent and document this.
- Fully inform and update other veterinarians involved in the treatment in practices with multiple providers.
- Are aware of their ethical and statutory responsibilities.
- Keep up-to-date in their field of practice and recognise their limitations.
- Seek second opinions or referrals when there is a risk of practising outside their areas of competence.
- Make clients aware of any limitations in their knowledge and experience to deal with the situation, particularly in emergencies.
- Avoid criticising other veterinarians.
- Do not hide the adverse event or complaint,
- Act quickly if a client complains.



- Take complaints seriously.
- Provide a prompt and honest explanation for what happened and why, and offer an apology if appropriate.
- Advise the client, where appropriate, of what actions have been taken to prevent it from happening again.
- Treat the adverse event/complaint as a valuable learning experience and where it may have been preventable, put in place measures to ensure it does not recur.

HOW CAN EMPLOYERS HELP TO REDUCE ADVERSE EVENTS AND COMPLAINTS?

Employers have a key role in ensuring the competence of their employees and in establishing the practice standards, protocols and workplace culture. This is particularly important in relation to newly registered or inexperienced veterinarians.

Factors such as high workloads, lack of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities, lack of support and poor workplace morale have the potential to impact negatively on the veterinarian's ability to perform.

Employers can assist their employees to deal with complaints by addressing these issues and providing an environment within which adverse events and complaints are discussed openly, analysed and mechanisms put in place to prevent them recurring.

