

# VETERINARY BOARD OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

## GUIDELINES ON RECORD KEEPING

### LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

#### ***Veterinarians Act***

The Board is empowered under section 6(e) of the *Veterinarians Act* to issue guidelines on standards in relation to the provision of veterinary services that must be observed by registered veterinarians and veterinary specialists.

Failure to uphold or maintain contemporary professional standards constitutes incompetence within the meaning of misconduct as defined in section 28 of the *Veterinarians Act*.

#### **Code of Conduct – Regulation 9 - Veterinarians Regulations**

The Code of Conduct prescribed at Regulation 9 of the Veterinarians Regulations requires registered veterinarians to be familiar with and abide by all legislation pertaining to veterinary practice; to maintain current standards of practice in their chosen areas of veterinary practice; and to carry out all veterinary services in accordance with the Board's guidelines.

Specifically,

#### Clause 1 – BASIC PRINCIPLES OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

**includes the requirement under 1(1)(b) for registered veterinarians to be familiar with and abide by all relevant legislation** affecting their professional activity and behaviour (**which includes** the *Veterinarians Act*, Veterinarians Regulations, **the Code of Conduct, and the Board's Guidelines**).

#### Clause 4 - KNOWLEDGE OF CURRENT STANDARD OF PRACTICE

provides at 4(1) that a registered veterinarian must maintain current standards of veterinary practice in their areas of veterinary practice and **requires at 4(1)(b) that registered veterinarians “always carry out veterinary services in accordance with those current standards and in accordance with the Board's guidelines.”**

Clauses 11, 12 and 16 of the Code of Conduct prescribe the following requirements on the provision, return and the maintenance of veterinary records:

#### Clause 11 PROVISION OF RECORDS

“A registered veterinarian who has previously treated an animal must, when requested to do so, and with the consent of the person responsible for the care of the animal, provide copies or originals of the case history records directly to another registered veterinarian who has taken over the treatment of the animal.”

## Clause 12 RETURN OF RECORDS

“A registered veterinarian to whom another registered veterinarian has referred an animal for treatment or a second opinion must return the records provided by the referring registered veterinarians as soon as practicable.

## Clause 16 RECORDS

- (1) A registered veterinarian must ensure that a detailed record of any consultation, procedure or treatment is made as soon as practicable.
  - (2) The Board has the power to audit records.
  - (3) The record must:
    - (a) Be legible and in sufficient detail to enable another registered veterinarian to continue the treatment of the animal; and
    - (b) Include the results of any diagnostic tests, analysis and treatments.
  - (4) A registered veterinarian must ensure that all records of any consultation, procedure or treatment are retained for at least 3 years after the records are made.
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## **GUIDELINES UNDER SECTION 6(e) OF THE *VETERINARIANS ACT***

### **RECORD KEEPING**

**(1)**  
**Contemporary professional standards for veterinary practice require that case notes should provide sufficient details to enable another veterinarian to continue the treatment of the animal at any time.**

This includes (but is not necessarily limited to) full details of:

- any condition or injury
- any examination, procedure, treatment
- any provisional or definitive diagnosis
- the results of any diagnostic tests
- estimates on likely extent and cost of treatment, given prior to treatment (as required by clause 7 of the Code of Conduct)
- any drugs prescribed and directions provided
- instructions given when the animal is discharged
- any drugs administered (including amount and route)
- anaesthetics given.

## **(2)**

### **Records on Anaesthesia**

The Board does expect anaesthetics to be monitored eg heart rate, respiration rate, gum colour, palpable reflex etc. It is accepted that in some emergency situations this is not always possible. However, for routine procedures requiring anaesthetics an assistant is required. The Board does expect the drug, time and route given, to be recorded. (See separate Guidelines on Anaesthesia).

In addition, veterinarians are required under section 48 of the *Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act* to maintain a register recording details of the supply or administration of controlled drugs.

## **(3)**

### **Board Reliance on Accuracy of Case Notes**

When a question of conflicting information arises, the Board will rely on the accuracy of the case notes. If there is no written record of the action a veterinarian says was undertaken, the Board will assume that it has not been done.

The case notes are an excellent opportunity for veterinarians to express their logic and efforts to do their best for a pet and its owner. Without them, the Board has to determine the likely chain of events, relying on the memory of both parties. There is no logical reason to solely believe the memory of a veterinarian who sees dozens of clients per day, over a client who probably saw only one veterinarian on that day.

## **(4)**

### **The Case for More Comprehensive Records**

The Veterinary Board is not the last point of call and cases can be taken to court. For this reason veterinarians may choose to keep even more comprehensive records. For example time and summaries of telephone calls, outlines of conversations in the consults, itemised written quotes (supplied to pet owners) and recorded anaesthetic monitoring would be useful. These practices may well avoid complaints in the first place. They would supply evidence of what actually happened and reduce the reliance on memory.

## **(5)**

### **Summary of Statutory and Professional Responsibilities for Upholding Contemporary Veterinary Standards in relation to Record Keeping**

In summary, individual veterinarians have a statutory and professional responsibility to uphold and maintain contemporary veterinary standards, which include record keeping. In turn, employing veterinarians are responsible for the standard of the clinical notes in their respective veterinary clinics.

NB

Practitioners should read these Guidelines in conjunction with the Code of Conduct prescribed in the Veterinarians Regulations and the additional Guidelines published by the Board under Section 6(e) of the *Veterinarians Act* on the Minimum Standards for:

- Anaesthesia
- Staff
- Veterinary Premises
- House-Call Practices

Copies can be accessed from the Board website: [www.vetboard.nt.gov.au](http://www.vetboard.nt.gov.au)

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