

VetSCOPE News

Prescriptions are a pain!!

Paddy McGinn, Carrickmacross, talks on one of the many benefits of VetSCOPE

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Taking the pain out of prescription writing

PADDY MCGINN, CARRICKMACROSS, TALKS TO VETSCOPE ABOUT PRESCRIPTION PRINTING



Paperwork has become a big issue in the veterinary profession, and increased pressure on Irish vets has come particularly in the wake of the Animal Remedies legislation. Whilst the majority of vets are compliant with the legislation, it seems that a small but significant number are not. According to DAFF figures, over 250 people have been convicted of offences under this section of the legislation in recent years, with 72 people receiving custodial sentences and just under €1 million in fines imposed.

One area that has been highlighted for special attention is prescription writing. According to the Animal Remedies legislation, vets are required to provide farm-animal clients with prescriptions at the time of administration or dispensation of drugs.

Although the majority of practitioners are meeting these requirements, the time-consuming nature of producing detailed, timely prescriptions in practice has caused vets some difficulties.

One option, to address these challenges, is to invest in a

**IT'S VERY EASY TO BE
100% COMPLIANT:
IT'S JUST A MATTER
OF PRESSING THE
BUTTONS**

technological solution such as the VetSCOPE Handheld device or VetSCOPE Mobile. Paddy McGinn, Carrick Veterinary Centre, Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan, has been using the system for three years and says computerisation has helped streamline his work. "It's very easy to be 100% compliant: it's just a matter of pressing the buttons. We pre-programme all of the [farm and drug] details into the computer so you need very little information – basically the tag number of the animal. The farmer's name comes up, you press the button and you

get your label to put on the bottle." The advantages of computerisation over hand-written prescriptions are obvious. McGinn says: "It's too cumbersome writing it out. If you use multiple drugs on a farm you could have 20 minutes of paperwork to do the thing right. With the computer you just press a button and off you go."

McGinn said the technology proved particularly useful during a recent DAFF inspection, where it demonstrated that the entire practice was "on top of" the Animal Remedies legislation. In addition, the VetSCOPE Mobile device also allows McGinn and his practice to remain compliant with other authorities such as the Revenue Commissioners. "Each vet in the practice has their own mobile laptop and they put on the calls themselves. Every Friday these are uploaded onto the computer system. This means that the VAT and stock is updated, and that you have a set of documents for your tax

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WELCOME

We have now turned the corner into a new year and a new decade. If we are to believe the comments from our politicians, we have also turned the economic corner. While the veterinary industry has encountered difficulties in this climate, the effects do not appear as severe as in other sectors.

It is likely that most of 2010 will be difficult in the general economy, but the outlook is brighter into the future. This optimism brought about by positive economic indicators will encourage consumer spending in this year and on into 2011.

Veterinary practitioners have a knowledge and expertise that is valued by their clients. We all need to remain focused and concentrate on building business and utilising resources. As the challenges of the new year take shape we hope this issue is thought provoking and helpful as you maximise your practice's potential.

Stephen Lawler

**Stephen Lawler
Lawler Developments Ltd**



VETSCOPE NEWS



Getting started with puppy parties

A well run puppy party is a win-win situation for vets, clients and pets. Whilst owners get free advice about their pet's health and the puppy gains valuable socialisation, vet practice staff get to build a stronger relationship with their clients. It's also the perfect opportunity to discuss responsible pet ownership and nip any canine behavioural problems in the bud.

If you've never held a puppy party before, there are a number of simple but important guidelines to follow. First, consider who will be involved. A maximum of 6-8 puppies per class is recommended and, ideally, the ages and sizes of the

puppies should be matched. There is some debate about what age of puppies should be involved – those that are too young will not have been fully vaccinated and those that are over 14 weeks will not, according to behaviourists, benefit as well from socialisation. A good balance is to allow puppies to attend after their first injection against core diseases. Also, make sure that there are enough hands on board – at least two experienced members of staff are needed to run a class. Rather than holding once-off single events, experts now recommend running a series of classes with the first one 'pet-free'. This allows vet staff to give owners a basic introduction to pet health and behavioural issues



'rewarding the good behaviour and ignoring the bad'. Also at the first event, the scene can be set for the following classes, emphasising that the focus is on socialisation and teaching good manners, not rough play and excitement.

In the first class with puppies, owners should arrive with their pets on leads. It's up to the person running the class as to whether or not the puppies are allowed off-lead during this class, but it's important that no more than two are allowed to meet at any one time. Too many puppies off-lead at one time can quickly get out of control and result in a situation that frightens one or more of the animals. This causes more harm than good with regards to socialisation. During this class owners are shown how to keep their puppies calm and quiet e.g. through using a soft voice and food titbits.

At the third and fourth visits – and here's where it gets really useful for vet staff – puppies can be introduced to the consult rooms and to veterinary techniques. How many times have you met a Westie that didn't like his feet being touched? Now's the

time to communicate to the owner the importance of handling a dog's feet, mouth and ears regularly at home. Puppies can also investigate consult rooms and try out the scales for size. These classes can also be used to instruct owners on giving tablets, clipping nails and cleaning teeth. Make sure that by the end of the four classes you have covered all of the most important topics: parasite control, vaccination, neutering, nutrition, insurance and behaviour.

There is no prescriptive one-size-fits-all for organising puppy classes. The key is to develop a plan that works for you and your practice. The classes are a valuable opportunity to intervene early and instruct owners on a wide variety of pet information. With luck and effort, the results will include happier clients and a waiting room of well-mannered pets.

Mandatory CVE:

GET AHEAD STAY AHEAD

Although the full effects of mandatory CVE (continuing veterinary education) will not be felt until 2012, it is something that should be 'on the radar' for Irish vets now. From January 2012 onwards vets will not be allowed to register with the Veterinary Council of Ireland unless they can demonstrate that they have carried out a certain level of CVE – 20 points over the preceding 12-month period (e.g., 2011) or 60 points over the preceding three years. (The first period, 2009-2011, will be backdated to August 2008 to incorporate any points earned at the WSAVA Dublin Congress).

So, how can a vet best prepare for 2012 and remain compliant with the new VCI rules? It's a two-pronged approach: carry out the CVE and make sure that it is recorded. Earning CVE points can be done in a variety of ways. Many vets choose to attend courses, seminars and clinical society meetings where one hour of study is equivalent to one CVE point. It's

worth noting that some of the practical courses, such as wet labs, give you double points (two CVE points for one hour of study). The *Irish Veterinary Journal* diary and the Veterinary Ireland website can help you keep track of what's available. And, although organised professional development can be expensive, some animal nutrition and pharmaceutical companies organise CVE

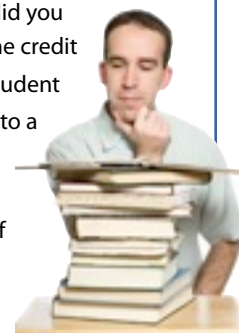
SOME ANIMAL NUTRITION AND PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES ORGANISE CVE EVENTS THAT ARE AT A REDUCED PRICE OR NO-COST TO ATTENDEES

events that are at a reduced price or no-cost to attendees. Ask your practice representatives for information about events in your area.

Vets can also get credits for presenting lectures to a professional audience or for publishing a peer-reviewed paper, although these are once-off allowances. Other, more general, veterinary activities such as overseeing vet students or getting involved in representative organisations can also earn

CVE points. For example, did you know that you can gain one credit a week for supervising a student that is 'seeing practice', up to a maximum of eight credits in any two-year period? Finally, the private study of written and audio-visual resources also counts, and there is one credit available for each hour of this 'non-assessed' CVE up to a maximum of 12 credits in any two-year period.

Carrying out CVE is only half the battle. Keeping track of all these activities so that the information is to hand in 2012 is also vital. Written CV record templates are available and CVE can be recorded online on the VCI website. Also, if you attend a conference, make sure that you pick up your attendance sheet, and that – where appropriate – it is signed. Finally, with private study and other non-assessed activities, a CVE diary which details what you have done and when will be invaluable by 2012. For more details, visit www.vci.ie.



VETSCOPE NEWS



Taking the lead

ACCOUNTANTS DO IT. SOLICITORS DO IT. SHOULDN'T BUSINESS-ORIENTED VETS DO IT?

Having a managing partner who takes responsibility for the business side of a practice is now more critical than ever.

A managing partner is akin to the chief executive of a partnership and usually has a number of responsibilities in a practice that reflect that. Key among them are:

- Reporting to partners on how the practice is performing;
- Ensuring day-to-day operations run smoothly;
- Taking responsibility for business decisions;
- Planning for future development and direction;
- Ensuring regulatory requirements and statutory obligations are met;
- Managing staff – both fellow partners and other employees; and,
- Representing the firm in an official capacity.

Unlike solicitors and accountants, who follow the same partnership model, vets are not, by their nature, steeped in business culture, and for this reason the

role of managing partner can often take a backseat as vets prefer to concentrate on the work at hand.

Sometimes the role is nominally held by the founder of the practice or the most senior member. In other cases, the managing partner role may be

non-existent as vets run the practice by group consensus. As veterinary practices, like all businesses, face the challenges of an uncertain 2010, the issue of who's

in charge would seem, at the very least, to be worth reviewing at the start of the year.

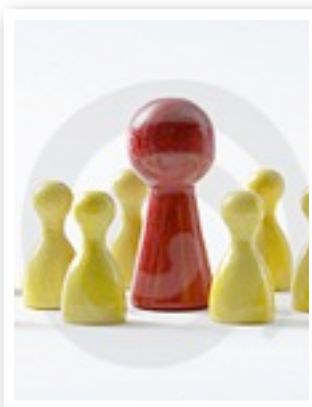
Steve Beddall is Principal of Animus, a UK-based management consultancy service focused on the veterinary profession and has over 22 years experience in advising vets on business organisation. "It varies greatly from practice to practice," he says of the managing partner role. "Some practices employ a dedicated business manager who exclusively handles the business side of the practice; others may choose to divide up the role among the partners, so that one handles marketing, the

other looks after finance, etc. In many situations, however, there is simply no managing partner. Vets work together and make decisions by consensus... In general, this works very poorly," he comments.

Of course, it's understandable why vets, trained and focused on animal care, tend to see the business side of the practice as something that will "take care of itself" and, in the good times, this kind of approach can work adequately. In the midst of a downturn, however, having someone focused on the business side of the practice isn't an optional extra. It isn't simply about ensuring the day-to-day operations run smoothly, either. Steve argues that the principle role of a managing partner is giving direction. "It's about setting out the strategic objectives of the practice for the next three-to-five years," he says.

Among younger vets, he notes far greater awareness of business management issues, particularly as elements of it now form part of veterinary education in many colleges. However, he also believes there is a fairly clear divide between those vets who have a

keen sense of the financials and those whose talents are more focused on the animal-care side. The key is to play to the talents of each. "Every practice is different and there's no one blueprint that suits everyone," he says. The challenge of finding the right approach, however, has certainly never been more pressing and every veterinary practice should be clear that it has an approach that makes the best of its resources as the challenges of 2010 take shape.



Useful hints

Did you know that there is a spell check incorporated into VetSCOPE? When you see a word underlined in red just right click and choose Suggested Spellings to see recommendations. Medical and technical words may not be present in the dictionary, but if you press the learn button, VetSCOPE will remember the spelling for future occurrences.

The VAT change that came into effect on 1 January 2010 went very smoothly for all our UK and Irish customers. We appreciate all the kind comments received. It is part of the customer-focused service we provide.

We encourage VetSCOPE customers to register on www.vetscope.ie to access additional hints and tips.

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at the end of the year." This also means that there is little time lag in client accounts, so when a client wants to settle a bill, the practice has access to the most up-to-date balance. The farmers balance is even

available on the mobile device. In addition, as vets are writing up their own consults, this decreases the chances of medicines or treatments falling off the bill, and frees up the admin staff back at the practice to carry

out other tasks. Convinced of the merits of VetSCOPE's mobile technology system, McGinn says: "I'm very happy with it – I don't know what we would do without it to be honest."

VETSCOPE NEWS



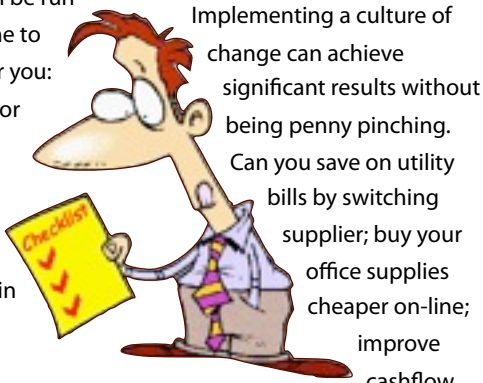
Management checklist 2010

TEN QUESTIONS YOUR PRACTICE SHOULD BE ABLE TO ANSWER AS YOU PLAN FOR THE YEAR AHEAD.



1. Who's in charge?

There are different models for how a practice can be run and now is the time to see what works for you: should you rotate or elect a managing partner; share the responsibilities among all the partners; or bring in a professional manager?



2. What's the strategy?

In the midst of uncertainty, employees need clarity and a sense of the direction in where the practice is going. Putting a plan in place for the next few years is one of the managing partner's most important roles.

3. Are you putting your customers first?

In an economic downturn, customers expect a higher quality service. Now is the time to consider honestly how your practice compares to your competitors. Do you have a marketing strategy to reach out to your customers?

4. Have you thought about fees?

Your clients are now much more likely to ask about fees upfront. It's important everyone in the practice understands your charges ("our fees haven't changed in five years...") but also agree on how to manage concessions for clients struggling to pay. Have you thought about how you can add value to the services you provide?

5. Are you cutting costs?

Implementing a culture of change can achieve significant results without being penny pinching. Can you save on utility bills by switching supplier; buy your office supplies cheaper on-line; improve cashflow by changing your billing and collection cycle times?

6. And avoiding false economies?

Most belt tightening is activity that should have happened anyway. Cutting in the wrong place - laying off valuable nursing staff or cutting back on marketing or planned investment - could seriously delay your recovery when the upturn comes.

7. What are your practice priorities?

The downturn may be the time to consider where the practice is going; reorient it if necessary and recruit

partners who can support this long-term strategy. Partners need to work together to establish where the priorities should lie.

8. Are you managing expectations?

Salary adjustments are now a part of life. The managing partner needs to be very clear with his or her partners, and the wider staff, about the financial challenges the practice faces and the prospects for 2010. It's important to ensure no nasty surprises down the line. There will also be a much greater sense of goodwill if communications are open and honest.

9. Are you planning for success?

There's a sense of doom and gloom all around us - and it's important not to let this permeate into the practice's everyday workings. This means get everyone focused on how, not if, the practice will move forward.

10. Have you considered how VetSCOPE can help?

VetSCOPE is a powerful business tool that will help you manage all



Clare Lawler, VetSCOPE, presents Diarmaid Morkan, Smith & Foley with his prize of an iPod for taking part in our competition at the CAVI 2009 conference.

aspects of your practice - from case work, to finance, to marketing, in an integrated manner. Over the year, the VetSCOPE Newsletter will highlight innovative ideas to help make managing the business easier and more cost effective, as well as delivering better service to your customers.

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