



vetscope NEWS

VetSCOPE Practice Management Software

Summer 2012

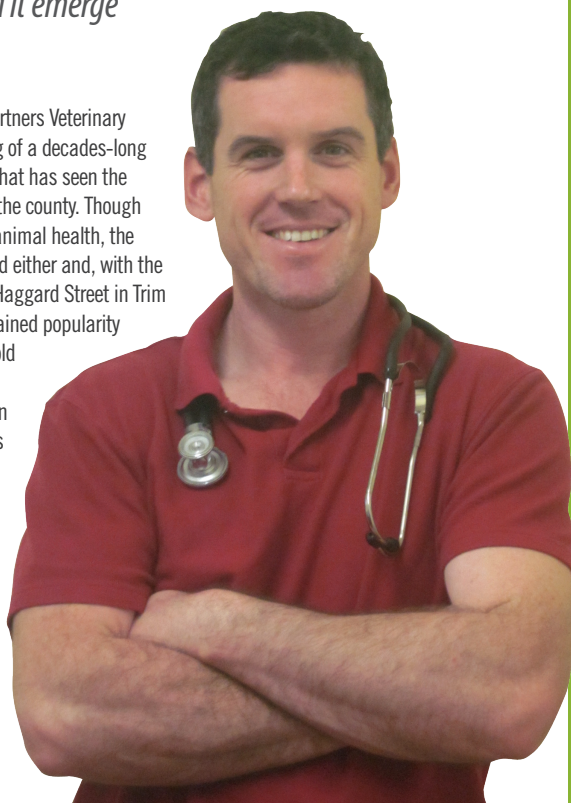


VETSCOPE UNDER THE MICROSCOPE

When a Department audit put one practice under the microscope, VetSCOPE helped it emerge with flying colours.

Pat Farrelly set up what is now Pat Farrelly & Partners Veterinary Clinic in Trim, Co. Meath, in 1962; the beginning of a decades-long relationship with the local farming community that has seen the practice grow into one of the most respected in the county. Though the practice has always been focused on large animal health, the opportunity for small animal hasn't been ignored either and, with the setting up of Paws a While Veterinary Clinic on Haggard Street in Trim a number of years back, they have enjoyed sustained popularity among pet owners in the town, even as household spend has diminished.

Over the years, Pat Farrelly & Partners has grown to a seven-man outfit and joining it in 2000 was local vet Padraig Farrell. Having graduated two years previously, Padraig worked for two years in Wales, before his keen interest in the area of fertility among dairy and suckler herds drew him back to his home county. Since then, his work has continued to focus on large animal, with bovine fertility at the heart of it. A recent survey conducted by the practice on their farmer clients found that fertility was considered the single most important issue affecting herd health, followed closely by mastitis and infectious diseases. The response



Padraig Farrell M.V.B. - Pat Farrelly & Partners

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WELCOME

HELPING YOU GET IT RIGHT

The summer of 2012, the farming community is already telling us, will not be forgotten in a hurry, and for all the wrong reasons. However, in spite of ongoing bad weather, there continues to be strong optimism about the place of agriculture in the future of our economy. This means an evolving and dynamic place for the veterinary profession and our keynote interview in this issue of VetSCOPE gives us a sense of how vets are now planning for this future. What is clear is that professional competency in animal care will need to be reflected in every aspect of a vet's business, including administration, and, in a world where paperwork grows ever more complex, VetSCOPE can play an important role in allowing veterinary practices to meet these exacting demands.

In a world of change, human nature tends to stay the same and, while the vast majority of a practice's clients will be a pleasure to deal with, from time to time, every business encounters more difficult customers. In this issue of VetSCOPE you'll find some insightful and humorous advice on how to identify and best handle your difficult clients.

On the back page you'll also find a report on our ever popular training days and some useful tips for backing up simply and securely. Something for every one!

Stephen Lawler
Managing Director
Lawler Developments Ltd





has been to offer complete herd health programmes utilising new technology, and VetSCOPE in particular has been a key part of this story.

Transition

'When I arrived first at the practice, we were doing all the TB testing on paper,' Padraig recalls. 'Everything was written out on forms, to be submitted to the Department of Agriculture.' The first step forward was to record the information on hand-held computers. In the early days, these were then printed off and posted to the Department. 'We have now moved on a step again, with the results now going directly online to the Department.'

The practice installed VetSCOPE in 2002 and Padraig recalls that 'the package we had, before that, was proving difficult. There wasn't a lot of choice on the market at the time, and VetSCOPE stood out as the strongest option. It turned out to be the right choice and it has worked out very well for us over the years.' A recent example of this was in 2011, when the practice put VetSCOPE Mobile on its laptops and made it a core part of its delivery service for vets on call out. 'This has lifted a huge amount of paperwork off the shoulders of vets. Printing prescriptions became compulsory some years ago. The laptops, with VetSCOPE Mobile installed, fulfil the requirement by printing all the details, with all the necessary information on them.' Meanwhile, back at the practice clinic and shop, VetSCOPE is doing the same thing: 'You can print labels for all the products going out, so you are fulfilling all your requirements with the Department of Agriculture in that way.'

User friendly

As a seven-man practice, assisted by veterinary nurses and other support staff, Padraig says the user-friendliness of the management software package is hugely important. 'VetSCOPE is quite straightforward and there are different levels of usability required in the business. Some people will just need the basics, and that is very easy to learn, while others can go into more detail in terms of printing off reports, or adding client information – it all depends on what you need to get out of the system.'

In his own large animal work, Padraig finds the ability to bring up herd health information very quickly to be particularly useful. 'If a farmer wants to see when they vaccinated last year, you can show them, as well as telling them when their vaccines are due this year.'

Audit

In early July, this year, the practice was audited by the Department of Agriculture, a relatively standard procedure that came with the added twist that it was also a training day, meaning the Department inspectors would use the occasion to teach local veterinary inspectors what to look for in their own audits.

'The auditor and inspectors were looking for compliance with the veterinary medicines legislation and were very satisfied with the fact that we were using VetSCOPE and the quality of the records coming through the system as a result,' Padraig explains. It was through conversation with the auditors that the strengths of one of the latest services VetSCOPE provides were demonstrated. Cascade is the EU system whereby veterinarians can use a drug for a reason other than that which it was licensed for, but requires a considerable amount of paperwork on each occasion. 'VetSCOPE is able to cover all aspects of Cascade, which can be a challenging area for some veterinary practices, and makes it a zero paperwork experience,' Padraig explains. 'The Department auditors were very impressed with that.'

Future

Business in the large animal sector has been generally good over the last year, Padraig notes, with cattle and milk prices holding up well and general buoyancy in the agri-food sector. Looking to the future, and the period of expansion planned, particularly in dairy, he expects it will coincide with overall improvements in herd health, such as the eradication of BVD. For vets, this will mean the emphasis moves away from emergency work and towards consultancy services. 'As farms get bigger, it will become more important than ever that records are kept correctly and vets will have a role in that. If vets aren't fully compliant with the paperwork they are providing to farmers that could cause a problem for the farmer, in terms of the EU single farm payment inspections. That's a concern that's brewing at the moment. In our audit, we were able to show that, using VetSCOPE, our paperwork is 100% compliant and that's an important message as the relationship between farmers, vets and the Department develops in the years to come.'

HANDLING DIFFICULT CLIENTS

The customer is king in every business, but not every client is a model of reason. VetSCOPE offers some shrewd advice on managing your more awkward clients

Clients who arrive at a veterinary clinic typically come with at least two pressing concerns – worry about their pet's health and about the potential cost of treatment, whether now or further down the line. Add to that the myriad number of issues that may be weighing on any individual's mind, and the widely different personalities a practice team will encounter on any given day, and it's not surprising that you will sometimes find a disruptive or disgruntled customer on your hands. However, no matter how out of order a client can appear to be, what's most important is how you and your team handle them and the situation that emerges. Good management of a difficult client says a huge amount about the overall professionalism of your service, and can be a long-term positive in the perception of your business among your staff, your partners and the public.

Stay calm

Clients often come to a veterinary clinic hoping for the best but expecting the worst. More importantly, in an emergency, many come expecting to be seen straight away. Feeling they are left waiting or have been forgotten or passed over is a common cause of ire, particularly for someone who is highly stressed already. The most important thing, when a client loses their cool, is not to follow suit. Listen carefully to what they have to say, look for the underlying reason behind their anger and explain calmly and clearly what the actual situation is. Of course, prevention is better than a cure, which means it's always a good idea to give people a realistic expectation, from the moment they arrive, of how long they can expect to wait and, where appropriate, how much the treatment will cost.

Who's in charge?

Your reception staff are likely to be at the frontline when a client behaves badly. Support staff can't be expected to have all the answers, however, so it's important to plan ahead for unpleasant client behaviour through training and discussion. Again,

it's important to get the message out that everyone needs to remain calm in the face of high emotions. Most people understand that dealing professionally with a client means not taking these situations personally. However, if a client becomes abusive or a situation gets out of hand, your staff need to know they have your support. It's a good idea to have an agreed room where the client can be taken to, where someone more senior can address their issues.

Money matters

When a client becomes heated over the cost of your services, or feels there was an issue in the quality of your practice's service delivery, you need to have an agreed course of action to follow. Do your office staff have the authority to offer a refund or discount in a situation where payment is at the heart of the matter? If so, you may find that you can ease a tense situation quickly. It's important that there is clarity on the extent of the discount your staff can offer; who can authorise a complete refund; and what situations will warrant it.

Mending mistakes

Client anger may be unpleasant but it isn't always unreasonable. In any practice, mistakes can happen and the implications can be challenging for everyone. Your practice should have a robust policy for dealing with such situations and it should be one that puts the client first. A straightforward, no quibble, refund is the simplest way to address an issue where the fault lies on your side. Your professional indemnity insurance providers can advise you on best practice in this regard.

Easy listening

Not all client difficulties revolve around outbursts of anger. Indeed, the very opposite can be an issue too - the client who feels that your clinic should be a listening service for them. There are, more often than not, sad realities behind such cases: individuals who have few social outlets in their daily lives, for example; but this doesn't change the fact that long calls or unnecessary visits can be disruptive to the daily running of a veterinary clinic, tying up staff who are required for other duties. No practice wants to turn a cold shoulder to its clients, so the best approach is to take control of the situation. Offer to call the client at a time that's convenient to the practice, and give support over a fixed period of time. End by agreeing the time of the next phone call.

Say goodbye

Sometimes, of course, there is simply no pleasing people. In every walk of life, you will encounter a small percentage of people who enjoy being difficult and for whom nothing is ever good enough. It usually becomes apparent very quickly if you have such a client on your hands.

Unacceptable behaviour can range from customers trying to bully staff, to behaving rudely to other customers, to endangering general safety. All such behaviors should be seen as unacceptable, but it's important, too, not to jump the gun. Except in extreme occasions, it makes sense to give a client a second chance. If a pattern of unacceptable behaviour emerges, however, then the practice needs to put its other customers, its staff and its reputation first. A formal letter from the clinic can be used to explain that the relationship between the two parties does not appear to be successful and advising the client that other clinics are available. This course of action is also sending a message to staff that their wellbeing is a priority for the practice.

RECOGNISE THESE?

Dealing with difficult clients needn't be a nightmare – so long as you know what to watch out for and how to handle them

Needy Nora

Her pet is number one in her life and she thinks it should be the same for you too. She is a regular caller to your practice (both in person and on the phone) and she expects to be given all the time she wants.

While she may seem to take up a lot of your time, people like Nora are the lifeblood of your practice. If she's calling excessively, take control of the situation and agree times when you'll call her instead. Remember she really does care about her pet and values (and will pay for) excellent service. Remember also that she can be your best advertisement if she is treated with respect.

Cheap Charles

The best things in life are free, and Charles believes that this applies to his pet's care and welfare too. He won't be happy paying there and then and is likely to contest every charge as an outrage. The key thing with someone like Charles is not to discover his true nature too late. If you are going to manage him as a regular client then he needs to pay upfront – otherwise you are adding an unnecessary administrative headache to your work. It's important that terms of payment are adhered to by all your clients and VetSCOPE can help you to keep track of this effectively and efficiently.

Doubting Thomas

Doubting Thomas is a complex case – he really cares about his pet's welfare but can always find a good reason why the best of your suggestions simply won't work in his case.

The secret with handling him is to be straightforward without being blunt, so as you manage him, you'll also learn to hone your own communication skills. Remember that you're the expert in the situation and focus on solutions that you know work. Handle his objections politely but firmly. Don't suggest a variety of solutions – have confidence in the ones you know work.

Brendan the bully

He is no fun to deal with and everyone dreads his arrival at the clinic. What can you do with someone who is rude to your staff and makes everyone generally uncomfortable? There are many proven ways to handle a bully – the most important being not to give into his demands when you know they could compromise you and your business. There is little point in arguing the toss with him either: no matter how convincing you think you are, you are unlikely to change his mind. The important thing with Brendan is to focus on the job at hand. Clarify the purpose of his visit and don't get sidetracked. Show courtesy and demand the same courtesy in return, both for you and fellow members of your staff. Finally, be prepared to end the professional relationship if need be – if Brendan is more trouble than he is worth then you need to be the one to address that.

Anne the amateur vet

Anne already knows what's wrong with her pet, thanks to Google and her own instinct in these matters. She doesn't particularly rate your skills in diagnostics but knows it's the only way to get her hands on the right treatment. Anne can be a difficult one to crack but, if you handle the situation in the right way, her thirst for knowledge, and her influence among others, can be used to your practice's advantage. Explain clearly to Anne what the issue is and why it's important to follow the guidelines you recommend. Don't spend time arguing about her version of the diagnosis but do ensure she leaves with a clear understanding of what the situation is and what the correct course of action must be.



DROPBOX AND VETSCOPE

Most of us are familiar with Cloud computing at this stage and Dropbox is a free storage area in the Cloud that every VetSCOPE user should take advantage of. Maintaining an offsite backup of VetSCOPE software has always been good practice and usually involves CD/DVD backup, which is then stored in a different geographic location from your veterinary practice. It can seem laborious but it is extremely important – ensuring you protect your business against the damage caused by unforeseen events such as fire, flood, lightning strike and theft. While, thankfully, these are not everyday occurrences, they do happen and there is plenty of data around to show they can be catastrophic to a business.

Dropbox (and its alternatives) essentially take the burden out of off-site back up. It is a service we in VetSCOPE use regularly and find very user-friendly. Dropbox can be set up easily on Apple Mac and Windows computers. Once you go through the routine setup, a Dropbox folder will appear on your computer and anything you copy into this folder will be stored in the Cloud, meaning it is not held directly on your computer or premises, and so can be accessed elsewhere (password protected of course). If you need access to your backup in an emergency, you simply log on to Dropbox with your username and password and download the backup to a new computer.

Dropbox can also be used to share files (word and excel documents) between office and home and/or between branches, meaning it is no longer necessary to carry information on memory sticks, etc.

Dropbox should be used as part of your current backup routine and NOT as a replacement for manual backups. To find out more about Dropbox, go to www.dropbox.com

VISIT OUR 'HOW TO' WEBSITE

The VetSCOPE website www.vetscope.ie is an excellent resource for all VetSCOPE users. Here you'll find step-by-step guides you can download, with detailed information on VetSCOPE services you may be planning to use for the first time or simply need a refresh on, for example stock control, client records, accounts, etc. Over the next few months, we'll be putting up more 'how to' videos and would like your suggestions for topics. To access this area, simply click on the support tab at the top of the screen and log in to the customer support section. If you are not already registered, then click on the 'register' section on the top right. You'll be informed by email when your account is active.



VETSCOPE TRAINING

A number of VetSCOPE training days were held earlier this year in our dedicated training facility in Dublin. Each session was well attended and highly rated by participants. The most recent course carried 6.5 CVE points and a similar level of points should be available for future courses. The course was entitled 'Advanced Level 1' and was geared to users who have been clients of VetSCOPE for six months or longer. The next course will be held in September, with the exact date to be confirmed. Keep an eye on our website www.vetscope.ie for details.

Feedback from our training day

'Stephen's passion is in driving revenue and growing turnover for his clients - not everyone thinks that way and it's refreshing... Well done.' **Geoff**

'The course was well worthwhile, easy to follow and very informative. Facilities were excellent, lunch was delicious, the handouts were easy to follow and very well explained.' **Moirra**

'Excellent day, everyone I spoke to during the day was very positive about it.' **Donal**

'Enjoyed the day, well organised and covered a lot.' **Ann**

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CONTACTING VETSCOPE

You can contact VetSCOPE by telephone in Ireland on +353 (0)1 2602207 and in the UK on +44 (0) 208 144 2602. Email: info@vetscope.ie or in writing to 44 Fosterbrook, Stillorgan Road, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, Ireland

