



# VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS REGISTRATION BOARD OF VICTORIA

## Board Update – December 2017

### President's Message

In this last *Board Update* for 2017, the Board welcomes two new veterinary Board members, Dr David Colson and Dr Stacey Sullivan – appointed by Governor-in-Council on 3 October 2017. We introduce them later in this newsletter.

The Board's 2016-2017 Annual Report was tabled in the Victorian Parliament in October and has been uploaded to the Board's website. This year saw a reduction in complaints from the previous reporting year, despite a 6% increase in the number of veterinary practitioners registered in Victoria. See more information on page 3.

At the Board's offices, year-end has been busy in investigation and registration, and work on upgrading office systems and communications is continuing.

Many Class 2017 graduating students from Australian veterinary schools have registered with the Board. We wish all graduate registrants a satisfying career in veterinary practice, and welcome you to contact the Board if you have questions about good veterinary practice.

See the announcement in this issue from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources on changes to the requirements for preparing companion animals for export.

This issue's contribution from Agriculture Victoria covers Australian Veterinary Association Annual Conference presentations from Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mark Schipp and Professor Chris Baggoley on global challenges in combating antimicrobial resistance and One Health.

The case study in this issue discusses an error when prescribing medication.

The Board extends its thanks to the veterinary practitioners who expressed interest in being appointed to a standing register of independent expert witnesses. We will be contacting all practitioners who expressed interest in the New Year.

On behalf of the Board and its staff, we wish all Victorian veterinary practitioners a safe and happy holiday season.

Peter Mansell  
**President**



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### New specialists in Victoria

Congratulations to the six veterinary practitioners the Board recently endorsed as specialists in the following fields:

- Dr Ke Shuan Chow [V5048], Feline Medicine
- Dr Amanda Ciavarella [V5543], Small Animal Medicine
- Dr Alasdair Renwick [V8613], Small Animal Surgery (Orthopaedics)
- Dr David Hall [V3870], Small Animal Surgery
- Dr Sonya Wasik [V4808], Small Animal Surgery
- Dr Geoffrey Nicolson [V8852], Veterinary Cardiology



## New veterinary Board Members

In October, the Governor-in-Council appointed two new veterinary members to the Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria. Dr David Colson and Dr Stacey Sullivan have attended a number of meetings at which the Board has benefitted from their extensive veterinary practice and administrative experience. We take this opportunity to extend a public welcome and introduce them to the Victorian veterinary practitioner community.



**Dr David Colson** graduated from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science in 1988, then completed a Masters in Dairy Cattle Medicine and Management in 1995.

Dr Colson has worked in mixed practice in South West Victoria for over 28 years, with a focus on dairy cattle. For the past 3 years, Dr Colson has worked with the Vet Group as a small animal senior

clinician, establishing policies and supervising patient care and client satisfaction standards in a busy small animal clinic.

Dr Colson is a member of the Cattle Chapter (Ruminant Nutrition) of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists. He has been a Board member of WestVic Dairy (DA – RDP) and The Vet Group, and has held honorary positions with the Western District Branch of the Australian Veterinary Association.

Industry, scientific and education programs in which Dr Colson has participated include:

- Project leader of the Dairy Australia National Lameness Project in 2013/14
- Austrade agricultural missions to China and India
- member of the ANZCVS Scientific Program committee for College Science Week, and
- Melbourne & Sydney University Academic Associates Program.

**Dr Stacey Sullivan** graduated from the University of Queensland with a Bachelor of Veterinary Science in 2004, then completed a residency in equine medicine at the University of Melbourne Equine Centre.



Dr Sullivan has a Masters of Veterinary Studies and is currently completing a PhD in exercise-induced pulmonary haemorrhage in racehorses.

Dr Sullivan is a Fellow of the Australian and New Zealand College of Veterinary Scientists in Equine Medicine, and sits on the fellowship examination committee.

Dr Sullivan currently runs a consultancy equine medicine service to several equine referral hospitals in Victoria.

Over the years, Dr Sullivan has worked in several large private equine referral practices in Australia and overseas, including

- Oakey Veterinary Hospital
- Goulburn Valley Equine Hospital, and
- Rosedale and Partners in the UK.

Dr Sullivan also has clinical experience in small animal emergency and mixed practice.

## Accreditation no longer required to prepare companion animals for export

### From the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

From 2 January 2018, the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture and Water Resources will no longer require veterinarians to be specially accredited to prepare **companion animals** (such as dogs, cats and pet birds) for export.

Veterinarians will no longer have to complete the Accreditation Program for Australian Veterinarians (APAV) to prepare companion animals for export, and the list of previously

accredited veterinarians will soon be removed from the Department of Agriculture website.

This means that from 2 January 2018 any veterinarian with current full registration with an Australian State or Territory Veterinary Board:

1. will be able to prepare companion animals such as dogs, cats and pet birds for export from Australia
2. will be eligible to purchase rabies vaccine for use when preparing dogs and cats for export (other

restrictions on the use of rabies vaccine are unchanged).

Veterinarians preparing companion animals for export should consult the step-by step INFORMATION PACKS at [www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/companion/vets](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/companion/vets)

**NOTE** there is **NO** change to the requirement that only [Australian government accredited veterinarians](http://www.agriculture.gov.au/export/controlled-goods/live-animals/companion/vets) can prepare **livestock** for export.



## Annual Report 2016-2017

The Board's 2016-2017 Annual Report was tabled in the Victorian Parliament in October and has been [uploaded to the Board's website](#).

During the 2016-2017 year, the Board met 14 times to oversee Board operations and initiatives, and the Board's Audit and Risk; Registration; and Communications, Regulation and Policy committees met regularly to support the Board's work.

This year, the Board refocused its mission statement on the Board's key functions:

**The Board's mission is to protect the public and the health and welfare of animals by regulating veterinary practitioners through the effective administration of the *Veterinary Practice Act 1997*.**

The Board also published a service charter stating the Board's commitment and approach to its stakeholders and explaining how stakeholders can assist the Board.

[View the Service Charter here](#)

The Board reviewed its fee schedule, with reference to fees set by other registration authorities and sectors, and developed a flexible and simple fee structure based on component service and registration fees.

Annual Report financials show the Board's financial resources are sound. Funded by the registration fees of veterinary practitioners, the Board is aware it has a responsibility to ensure it does not impose unnecessary financial or regulatory burdens on the profession while at the same time reconciling income and expenditure.

With the support of new General Manager Dr Glenice Fox, the Board has initiated projects to improve and streamline processes and communications.

Complaint and registration application forms, and other documents and communications, are under review. We are also reviewing Board policies and procedures so they are up-to-date, clear and consistent, and reflect the needs of veterinary practitioners, the public, and other stakeholders

The Board is upgrading its membership software to increase capacity to interact with stakeholders electronically and meet reporting and compliance obligations.

### Complaints and investigations in 2016-2017

The Board received significantly fewer complaints in 2016-2017 than in 2015-2016. While receiving any complaint is of concern to the Board, the decrease in the proportion of complaints to veterinary practitioners in Victoria indicates that the community can be confident that they receive a high standard of service from veterinary practitioners in Victoria.

#### Complaints snapshot 2016-2017

- 237 initial enquiries
- 67 written complaints
- 59 complaints investigated by the Board
- 20 informal hearings
  - 12 findings of unprofessional conduct which was not of a serious nature
  - 8 findings that there was no unprofessional conduct.

This year, 76% of complaints involved companion animals, with dogs comprising 88% of those companion animals.

### Registration in 2016-2017

In addition to developing the new fee structure, the VetConsole on the Board's website was redesigned to make renewing registration online as straightforward as possible.

This contributed to 95% of veterinary practitioners renewing online in 2016-2017, an increase of 12% from 2015-2016.

#### Registration snapshot 2016-2017

- 3,207 veterinary practitioners registered in Victoria – up 6% from 2016.
- 42 general registrants were reinstated to the register
- 256 practitioners were granted general registration in Victoria
- 38 practitioners were granted specific registration with conditions
- 6 general registrants were granted specialist endorsement
- 10 registrants gained honorary registration

## Take the insomnia survey!

Veterinary practitioners are invited to complete a 20-minute anonymous online survey investigating social support, insomnia, and psychological distress in the veterinary profession.

The survey aims to explore the association between insomnia and

psychological distress, and whether perceived social support may act as a buffer between insomnia and psychological distress in veterinarians.

The survey is being conducted by Susan Titcumb, Masters of Clinical Psychology student at Federation

University (Ballarat), under the supervision of principal researcher Ms Susan Lauder.

Federation University's Human Research Ethics Committee has approved the survey (# A17-140)

[Click here to take the sleep survey](#)



## Releasing practitioner names to complainants

Under the provisions of the *Veterinary Practice Act 1997*, the Board only has the power to investigate individual registered veterinary practitioners, not veterinary clinics or practices.

When a person lodges a complaint with the Board, they must name the individual veterinary practitioner that the complaint is about.

People sometimes contact the Board to say they do not know the name of the practitioner who treated their animal, and that when they asked the clinic for the practitioner's name the clinic would not release that information.

The Board expects veterinary practitioners to introduce themselves to animal owners when providing a veterinary service.

The Board also expects the names of treating practitioners to be given to animal owners, if requested.

## Australian Veterinary Association 2017 Annual Conference presentations

### From Agriculture Victoria

Agriculture Victoria extends its thanks to all who visited the stand it hosted at the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) Annual Conference in Melbourne In June 2017.



**Victorian veterinarians Dr Peter Penson and Dr Shyuan Seah at the Agriculture Victoria stand (with Daisy the paper maché cow!)**

Some of the sessions at the AVA Annual Conference covered local and global strategies for tackling anti-microbial resistance and disease transmission.

### Dr Mark Schipp on global challenges and antimicrobial stewardship

Australian Chief Veterinary Officer Dr Mark Schipp presented at the AVA Annual Conference on Australian veterinarians and global challenges – covering the role of veterinarians, One Health and zoonoses, animal health and international trade, emerging diseases and emergency responses, and antimicrobial resistance and stewardship.

Dr Schipp emphasised, 'Veterinarians need to demonstrate that they are not the problem but a critical part of the solution.' He advised vets to address client expectations around the need to use antibiotics, and to review prescribing, dispensing and administering practices. Echoing key messages from University of Melbourne experts (to be covered in the next issue of the *Board Update*), Dr Schipp asked veterinary practitioners to consider using narrow spectrum antibiotics instead of broad spectrum antibiotics in particular cases.

Dr Schipp further urged the following:

- Use published therapeutic guidelines where these are available.
- Use culture and sensitivity testing to target treatment for a disease or a condition, which will then allow adjustment of empirically used antibiotics.
- Apply infection prevention and control standards on-farm and in the clinic.
- Use farm biosecurity plans to help reduce the occurrence of disease and prevent the spread of infection between animals and thus the need for antibiotic treatment.

### Professor Chris Baggoley on One Health

Former Australian Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Baggoley, both a veterinarian and a medical doctor, also presented at the AVA Annual Conference.

Professor Baggoley gave a personal perspective on the concept of One Health, sharing his insights on disease transmission; incidents relating to the Hendra virus, swine and avian influenza viruses, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus, Ebola and Zika viruses, E.coli and Campylobacter bacteria; and the involvement of animals.

### Useful materials

- View Dr Schipp and Professor Baggoley's complete presentations at [agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr) > [Resources and presentations](#)
- Download evidence-based prescribing guidelines and principles of appropriate use of antimicrobials at [agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr](http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr)
- Email your order for magnets with key messages and other educational materials to [animal.biosecurity@ecodev.vic.gov.au](mailto:animal.biosecurity@ecodev.vic.gov.au)



## Case study – Error when prescribing medication

### Summary

A nine-year-old cat was presented for a review of his diabetic condition.

Dr S examined the cat and performed serial blood tests to assess his blood glucose levels. Following review of the test results, Dr S mistakenly advised the cat's owner to increase the insulin dose instead of decreasing it. The cat died that evening.

After a preliminary investigation, the matter was referred to an informal hearing into the professional conduct of Dr S.

In making the decision to refer the matter to an informal hearing, the Preliminary Investigation Panel considered whether the mistake by Dr S could be assessed as negligent, i.e. *going beyond a simple reasonable mistake or error*. The Panel considered that the mistake **could** be assessed as negligent, and referred it to an informal hearing.

At the informal hearing it was alleged that:

- Dr S prescribed the incorrect dosage of insulin to the cat's owners for the treatment of his condition, which subsequently resulted in the cat's death.

Dr S was found to have engaged in unprofessional conduct, and the Panel determined that Dr S be counselled.

**Counselling** is a determination that may be made following a finding of unprofessional conduct. It is a formal process during which the veterinary practitioner is informed of how their conduct failed to meet the minimum required standard and how that standard might be met in future. The Panel may counsel in any way it sees fit. The counselling may be

oral, written, given immediately, or given within 28 days of the determination.

Counselling is permanently recorded on the veterinary practitioner's file and may be referred to in any future hearing or action taken by the Board.

### Chain of events

The owner took the cat to the clinic, as the cat had suffered a seizure the night before.

The cat had previously been diagnosed with diabetes by the clinic and was still in the process of weekly blood tests to monitor his condition.

The cat was presented to Dr S, who admitted him for serial blood tests to establish a glucose curve. The results of these tests indicated that the cat's insulin was too high.

Dr S, in consultation with another practitioner from the clinic, decided to lower the insulin dose to help bring the cat's glucose levels back to normal.

However, when the owner collected the cat, Dr S incorrectly advised an **increase** in the insulin dose to 4 units twice daily instead of lowering it to 2 units twice daily.

That evening the cat died, as a likely consequence of the incorrect dose of insulin being administered.

### The informal hearing and reasons for finding

The owner described to the informal hearing panel the distress of watching the cat's violent reaction to the overdose of insulin preceding his death.

Dr S informed the Panel that they were on their own at the clinic that day and had been very busy.

Dr S was not able to provide an explanation as to why the owner

was given incorrect dosage information, and was extremely upset and remorseful given the outcome.

The Panel acknowledged that Dr S was open and honest with the cat's owner about the error, and Dr S understood the distress caused to the cat's owner.

The Panel considered that both Dr S and the clinic had addressed the situation with open disclosure, acceptance of responsibility, and sensitivity.

For a medical error to be considered negligent, various legal decisions have provided that the relevant conduct must be a substantial departure from reasonably expected standards, and not simply accidental.

While veterinary medicine is a complex field, and veterinary practitioners are not expected to be perfect, in this case the informal hearing panel determined that the error made by Dr S, which resulted in the death of the cat, did not meet the standard expected of a registered veterinary practitioner exercising reasonable skill and care.

### Reflections

While not all mistakes will be regarded as unprofessional conduct, the Board is more likely to consider a mistake to be indicative of unprofessional conduct if the error was caused by poor processes, such as inadequate checking, monitoring, or detection processes; or where the consequences were significant for the owner or patient.

The Board may also take into consideration any efforts by a practitioner to mitigate or remediate a situation after detecting an error.



## Emergency response summer bulletin

Vets Beyond Borders' Australian Veterinary Emergency Response Team (AVERT) has published its Summer Bulletin covering:

- bushfire preparedness information for horse owners
- State & Territory emergency contact information, and
- training courses on
  1. foot and mouth disease
  2. emergency animal disease preparedness and response arrangements.

Contact Vets Beyond Borders for a copy of this bulletin at [www.vetsbeyondborders.org/contact](http://www.vetsbeyondborders.org/contact)

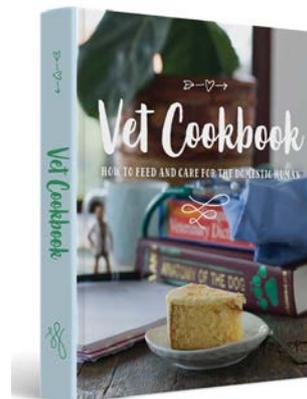
## Eat well and support veterinary mental health

The Centre for Veterinary Health has published a cookbook for the veterinary profession, the ***Vet Cookbook: how to feed and care for the domestic human.***

Created by the veterinary profession for the veterinary profession, the book contains over 100 recipes from veterinarians, veterinary nurses, groomers, students, practice owners, specialists, and medical doctors.

The book also contains tips for maintaining wellbeing, getting help when things get too much, and bouncing back, from mental health professionals, counsellors, and members of the veterinary profession.

The Centre for Veterinary Health will be using the proceeds from the sale of the book to produce and deliver free mental health resources for the veterinary profession.



More information and orders: [www.cve.edu.au/vet-cookbook](http://www.cve.edu.au/vet-cookbook)

## 2017 Honorary registrants

The Board has granted honorary registration to the following 10 veterinary practitioners who have attained the milestone of first registering in Victoria 50 years ago.

- Dr Peter George Ellis [V634]
- Dr Deric Maurice Gooey [V640]
- Dr Daryl Montgomery Hoffmann [V589]
- Dr Geoffrey Dorrat Rankin [V614]
- Dr John Robert Sandford [V597]
- Dr Warwick Sydney Stott [V562]
- Prof Michael Justin Studdert [V637]
- Prof Virginia Diane Perryman Studdert [V566]
- Dr Eric John Thornton [V602]
- Dr Doreen Elizabeth Tudge [V638]