



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

After-hours hospitalisation of patients

Veterinary practitioners are not required to provide after-hours hospitalisation. When 24-hour supervised after-hours hospitalisation is not provided, veterinary practitioners must inform clients of the available options for after-hours supervision, including the advantages, disadvantages and cost estimates of these options.

The level of supervision of animals hospitalised overnight in veterinary hospitals varies and some may not be under constant supervision. However, many clients are not aware of this and this misconception is often the cause of misunderstanding and complaints received by the Board. These complaints tend to arise when clients find there were options in 24-hour hospitals that they were not informed about.

It is the veterinary practitioner's responsibility to ensure the client's right to be fully informed is satisfied. The veterinary practitioner should discuss the benefits that the specific form of after-hours hospitalisation available at their hospital may provide to the animal and client, the level of supervision that will or could be provided during hospitalisation, the various other options available, and the costs of these various options.

Options may include (but are not limited to):

- no supervision – animal left unattended
- minimal supervision – scheduled supervised visits by veterinary or nursing staff during the hospitalisation period
- constant supervision – veterinary or nursing staff to provide constant supervision throughout the hospitalisation period
- referral to another facility e.g. an after-hours emergency centre
- client taking the animal home to provide supervision.

Discussion of the available options and agreement to any of these options and the associated costs constitutes informed consent and should be noted in the medical record.