



VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Obtaining informed consent policy

Veterinary practitioners must, where it is practicable to do so, obtain the informed consent of the person responsible for the care of an animal before providing veterinary services to the animal.

Informed consent means that a client is provided with sufficient relevant information that a reasonable person in the client's position needs to make a considered decision about whether to accept or reject the recommended treatment/course of action.

Veterinary practitioners must ensure they have obtained consent for any procedures undertaken, and that they have explained the likely costs and outcomes.

Consent requirements may not apply in an animal welfare emergency situation where the client is not contactable and there is an immediate need to relieve unreasonable or unnecessary pain or suffering.

Whenever possible, consent should be recorded in writing such as a consent form. This form should be witnessed, retained on file, and the client given a copy if requested. When verbal consent is necessary, this should be recorded in the medical record.

A consent form should contain:

- a) the owner's name, address, and telephone number including a contact number for the day of the procedure, where possible;
- b) a description of the patient (name, species, breed, colour, age and sex);
- c) name, address, and telephone numbers of the agent if the patient is not presented by the owner; and there should be a statement for the agent to sign, indicating they are legally authorised to present the patient;
- d) a clear description of the procedure/s to be undertaken;
- e) an estimate of the cost of the procedure; and
- f) the witnessed and dated signature of the owner or agent.

The following information should be provided:

- the likely diagnosis where appropriate and the reason for the proposed course of action;
- treatment options including expected outcomes, risks, side effects, benefits and costs including a written consent form if requested or generated during discussions;
- the veterinary practitioner's experience and skills to undertake the treatment, where appropriate;
- referral options, where appropriate; and
- post treatment requirements and ongoing costs that are not including in the initial estimate.

The medical record should also include a summary of relevant discussions about options that took place to arrive at the treatment decision(s) and a note of a client's decision not to proceed with the

veterinary practitioner's optimal recommendation (for example declining a second opinion or referral).

Part of the discussion to obtain informed consent should include how the veterinary practitioner can contact the client during the procedure to discuss unexpected outcomes. Veterinary practitioners should also gain the client's agreement to act without further consent if it becomes necessary in the interests of the animal.

It is recognised that there are still circumstances where specific consent is difficult to obtain because it may not be known prior to commencing a procedure, exactly what will be necessary or how long it will take. For example, the exact number of teeth to be removed when performing dentistry, or the requirements during exploratory surgery.

The Board recommends that informed consent be discussed for the extraction of diseased or compromised teeth, prior to commencement of a general anaesthetic where a dental examination or dental procedure may occur or has been recommended and an estimate of cost for this should be given upon administration.

If complications or unexpected results arise during or after treatment, the possible causes, further treatment options, costs, and prognosis must be discussed promptly with the client.

The veterinary practitioner responsible for the case must ensure that informed consent has been given before proceeding. Delegating some or all of the consent process to other staff (such as a veterinary nurse or receptionist) may be appropriate when:

- the proposed treatment is a common procedure, especially when requested by the client e.g. de sexing operations; and
- the staff have been appropriately trained and protocols are in place and followed.

The accountability for the process remains with the veterinary practitioner in charge of the case and there must be the opportunity for clients to talk with the veterinary practitioner if they have expressed any concerns or request to do so.

Veterinary practitioners must not undertake procedures in a mobile veterinary clinic unless the mobile clinic is licenced to perform these procedures. If so, a detailed explanation of any increased risks to performing the procedure are made to the client, and with the informed consent of the client.

Consent forms

While there is an onus on animal owners to thoroughly read any form provided to them for signature, it cannot always be assumed that a signature on a form is evidence of informed consent. The veterinary practitioner should ensure that before an owner signs a consent form, they are fully informed of details of the recommended treatment, prognosis, foreseeable risks and complications, and associated costs.