

VETERINARY SERVICES FOR HOUSEHOLD PETS MARKET INVESTIGATION

Summary of hearing with Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) held on 14 March 2025

Introduction

1. RCVS noted the opportunity to meet with the Group and the forensic and collaborative approach the CMA has taken to the market investigation.
2. RCVS said that there was a recognition that the veterinary sector was a very complex market. RCVS said that while it did not necessarily agree with all the thinking set out in the working papers to date, it wanted to focus today on the areas where there was agreement.
3. RCVS said that as a Royal College that regulates it was able to do things under its charter to introduce and improve the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) and regulate veterinary nursing and that was important context.

Regulation of veterinary businesses

4. RCVS explained that it was currently in the process of enhancing its existing 'Find a Vet' tool to be launched next year to provide more information to consumers about what veterinary practices are near them and what services they provide and facilities they have. RCVS suggested that more information could also be provided on 'Find a Vet' about the appointed senior veterinary surgeon, pricing, practice ownership, how to complain, how to take a complaint to the Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS) and potentially consumer satisfaction data. RCVS told us that it could also improve the PSS to include more standards around client mediation.
5. RCVS told us it would like to see a licence-holder-based scheme to allow it to regulate businesses as well as individual veterinary surgeons and vet nurses. RCVS said that this could mean a licence holder who may or may not be a veterinary surgeon who would be responsible for meeting the required standards. Alongside that they would be supported by an appointed senior veterinary surgeon, who would be responsible for the clinical aspects of

delivery. RCVS said that this would also include an inspection process with improvement notices etc and that licences could be revoked on that basis.

6. RCVS told us that the voluntary PSS and being an accredited practice was probably a good starting point for measuring quality as it demonstrates that the practice is meeting a set of standards. RCVS noted that there were some good clinical audit measures that give indicators of the quality but that they could be difficult to communicate effectively to consumers.
7. RCVS said that any price transparency needed to cover the sort of things that are relevant for the various life stages of an animal and linking associated products and services together because that is what the consumer needs to understand. RCVS told us that there was room for a range system of pricing because there are very acceptable but different ways to do things.
8. RCVS said that, regarding pricing, one question it was considering was how far it was possible to define a package of different services, including key procedures and care and medicines to support that.
9. RCVS said that trying to separate out individual prices from associated treatments and overall services may not help inform consumers effectively. RCVS also said that for price lists to be useful they needed to be sufficiently comparable and could be particularly helpful when pet owners are choosing their first veterinary practice.
10. RCVS said that other potential options include the provision of price ranges, packages of prices or historic pricing but that these could be difficult to monitor and enforce. RCVS said that they are exploring how to make medicine pricing information more accessible to pet owners but noted the difficulty in creating something comparable given different dosages, formulations and other factors such as the breed and size of the animal.

The role of veterinary nurses

11. RCVS said that there was potential to provide more clarification and guidance relating to the role of veterinary nurses and Schedule 3.
12. RCVS told us it was considering creating a flow chart to assist with giving vet nurses more guidance for when they can be involved in various processes and the different points that intervention from a veterinary surgeon was required.
13. RCVS said it would like to make it easier to for vet nurses to go and work out of people's homes to do things that clients might find difficult such as giving medications or diabetic cat care, but that this would take new legislation.

RCVS noted that these measures might offer better job satisfaction for vet nurses as well as improved patient outcomes and client experience.

Complaint handling

14. RCVS said its focus on complaint handling and redress was very much around information provision and awareness. As referred to above, RCVS said it wanted to use its 'Find a Vet' to ensure information on complaint handling was available to consumers including reference to the VCMS. RCVS told us it had also recently produced some new advice to animal owners about their options if things go wrong.
15. RCVS said it was thinking about alternative dispute resolution mechanisms within VCMS, such as arbitration or mandatory adjudication, and said it would consider running a pilot of a voluntary adjudication stage.
16. RCVS said that in the event of new legislation one possibility would be to retain VCMS as the consumer redress body alongside RCVS being able to regulate practices and set standards for complaint handling, including what information practices must provide consumers.