

Preamble

The Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia Incorporated (VNCA) has initiated this guide to professional conduct for veterinary nurses. The code of conduct will assist veterinarians and veterinary nurses in maintaining acceptable professional standards.

Upon entering the practice of veterinary nursing each veterinary nurse accepts the responsibility and trust vested in the veterinary profession and the corresponding obligation to adhere to the profession's understanding of professional conduct.

Veterinary nurses have a responsibility to animals, their owners, their employers, the profession and society to provide safe and competent veterinary nursing which is responsive to individual, employer and community needs. This code of professional conduct calls for accountability to a set of national minimum standards.

Veterinary nursing is carried out in a variety of settings. All veterinary nurses are personally accountable for their own performance in whichever setting the work practices occur. There are a number of factors outside the control of a veterinary nurse, which may affect the practice setting and the care provided. These factors can and will be taken into consideration by professional bodies and/or courts should the nurse be called to account for the quality of nursing care given to animals under the direction of a veterinarian and within the legislation regulating veterinary practice in that state or territory.

Interpretation of terms

Agreed Standards

The national competency standards for veterinary nursing (RUVEN98), represent the agreed competency standards for the profession.

Code of Conduct

General statements of the standards for accountable professional conduct.

Competency Standards

Competency standards are standards of practice set by the profession for its members and society. The competency standards detail the behaviour and practice for which veterinary nurses are accountable, and serve as benchmarks for practice. They embody the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required within veterinary nursing.

Veterinary Nurse

In this code of professional conduct the title 'Veterinary Nurse' applies to persons who hold certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing (or the equivalent as recognised by the VNCA) and are employed as a veterinary nurse.

Purpose of the code of professional conduct

- i To inform the profession of the minimum standards of professional conduct.
- ii To inform the public of the minimum standards of professional conduct.
- iii To provide appropriate bodies with a basis for decisions regarding standards of professional conduct.

General standards

Veterinary Nurses:

- i Should be familiar with and work within the requirements of all relevant legislation in that state or territory.
- ii Are personally responsible for maintaining their own professional standards.
- iii Shall act at all times in the best interests of the animal (subject only to the instructions of the owner/keeper and employer), and in such a manner as to justify the trust and confidence of the public and to uphold the good standing of the veterinary profession.
- iv When care is delegated, should do all in their power to ensure that the delegation of the care does not compromise patient and client safety and well-being. Each nurse has an obligation to ensure that safe and competent veterinary nursing is not compromised by any personal limitations of the nurse.
- v Should uphold the agreed standards of the profession (National Competency Standards for Veterinary Nursing RUVEN98).

Acknowledgments

- i Veterinary nurses are expected to maintain their professional knowledge and competence.
- ii They are expected to acknowledge any limitations in their competence and where necessary make these known to their employer.
- iii Similarly an employer should not ask a veterinary nurse to undertake any task above and beyond their known level of competence.

Relationship with veterinary colleagues

- i Subject to this code of conduct, veterinary nurses should cooperate fully with veterinary surgeons, assisting them in the provision of veterinary care.
- ii They should encourage and help colleagues to develop their professional skills.

Confidentiality

- i The veterinary nurse must keep confidential any information acquired in the course of their work relating to an animal or owner, an employer or fellow employee.
- ii Such information must not be disclosed to anyone except where they are required to do so in a court of law.

Health & safety

Veterinary nurses should be mindful of their responsibility to report to their employer any circumstances where the health and safety of staff or animals is put at risk.

Legislation

Veterinary nurses have a responsibility to understand and adhere to current legislation relevant to the industry. Some of the relevant acts and codes are as follows:

- State Acts for the Control of Domestic Animals
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Acts
- The National Health & Medical Research Council's Code of Practice on the Use of Animals in Research Areas
- State Departments of Agriculture Codes of Welfare Practice for; animals in transit; animal management; each farming sector and slaughter
- National Parks and Welfare Acts
- Food and Drug Acts
- Veterinary Surgeons Acts
- Relevant State Departments of Health Acts and
- Occupational Health and Safety Acts

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Code of Professional Conduct

for
Veterinary
Nurses

