



Following the Competition and Markets Authority's announcement that they will be conducting an investigation into the veterinary sector, there has been media discussion and focus on animal owner and veterinary practice relationships.

Coverage has focused on pricing, information on options, out of hours veterinary care in specific local markets, and medication charges. Veterinary complaints often involve highly emotional and difficult situations so discussing queries, concerns and dissatisfaction can be challenging for all involved. It is important that animal owners, as consumers, can and do raise issues and practices work hard to address and for quality improvement.

Early and informed conversations are important in enabling animal owners to make the best decision for their animal and their families. Where animal owners have concerns about specific issues, it is important that they are able to raise these early with the practice so that these can be addressed and owners and the veterinary team can work together and the best interest of the animal. The overwhelming majority of veterinary teams are made up of dedicated and committed professionals working hard for their patients and clients. They are often very aware of the stresses and pressures on animal owners when faced with complex decisions.

The VCMS would encourage animal owners and veterinary clients with views and insights on the policies and pricing structures within veterinary practices to share their insights with the Competition and Markets Authority so that these can be fed into the wider review on the particular areas of CMA focus.

The VCMS supports animal owners and practices to resolve complaints through mediation. At this time, the VCMS is sharing guidance on how complaints can be raised and resolved in a confident and





constructive way:

ANIMAL OWNERS

1. Ask to speak to a member of the team explaining that you have some concerns and would appreciate an opportunity to discuss these. Asking questions and seeking clarification at an early stage will help to avoid issues arising;
2. Keep concerns focused on the factual events and try to avoid personal criticism of individuals within the practice. You may not intend to be aggressive, but it is worth keeping in mind the 'stand in each others shoes' principle - how would I feel if I was being spoken to in this way? Is that my intention? ;
3. Be clear in your understanding of what is to happen next, including when you are expecting to hear, and any specific areas or suggestions, you have to resolve matters.

VETERINARY PRACTICES

1. For many sectors, CMA reviews have been helpful and delivered improvements for both consumers and professions involved;
2. Communication is key – encouraging clients to raise concerns and worries as early as possible as a conversation allows issues to be clarified and addressed informally;
3. At VCMS, the mediation focuses on listening and understanding both perspectives. In understanding the situation from the animal owner's point of view and why they feel the way they do, can help to find a way forward.

The best outcomes are achieved when animal owners and the veterinary team approach issues as a shared problem that they can work together to resolve. This helps to keep a constructive and open dialogue.

For more insight-based guidance, visit vetmediation.co.uk.

If concerns cannot be resolved within the practice then the veterinary mediation service offers independent complaint resolution through mediation to help find a way through and to resolve your complaint.

It is important that consumers in any sector are able to raise concerns and for any wider issues to be considered and addressed. The CMA investigation provides a mechanism for this to happen which VCMS would hope to see strengthening the veterinary client and practice relationship. In recent days, we have heard many stories of the challenges faced by both animal owners and practices. We have also heard some positive anecdotes which highlight the importance and value of strong and trusted relationships between animal owners and veterinary practice, which is beneficial for all concerned.

