



VETERINARY CLIENT MEDIATION SERVICE



# How We Can Help



We are an independent and free service for clients (animal owners) and veterinary professionals. Our service is funded by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) who regulate veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses.



All veterinary practices should have their own internal complaints procedure to deal with any complaints raised by clients. Most concerns are normally resolved informally. When a complaint cannot be resolved, the VCMS offers an impartial service to assist both parties to reach a solution they are both happy with. We understand that it is important that this is done fairly and quickly. We are respectful of equality and diversity - anyone who makes a complaint and anyone against whom a complaint is made will be treated fairly, whatever their background or circumstances.

## VCMS MEDIATION PROCESS

The telephone mediation process attempts to resolve problems without taking sides, making judgments or giving legal advice. The VCMS will provide mediation, facilitate good communication and help progress the parties to find a solution to the complaint. We will listen to your complaint and then gather information to establish what happened. We will then work with both you and the veterinary practice involved to help reach a fair resolution. By exploring why you are dissatisfied, and listening to both sides, we will support everyone involved to work towards a solution.





The process is:

- Telephone-based mediation
- Confidential
- Impartial
- Resolution focused
- Voluntary

We work with animal owners and veterinary practices to resolve complaints about vets and their practice efficiently and quickly. We will offer solutions rather than impose decisions. The outcomes agreed through mediation can be different to those available at court and through legal procedures. We work with clients and veterinary practices to reach a solution that both sides can accept, whether that is an apology, remedial treatment, a refund or referral to another professional. We cannot award or recommend compensation. The VCMS does not investigate or find either party to blame/at fault. This means we do not arbitrate or adjudicate complaints. We cannot make any judgment or force a party to mediate.

Within the mediation, a Resolution Manager will explore the issues raised and how these can be resolved. In doing so, the discussions may cover accepted clinical standards, the legal duties of veterinary professionals and animal owners, consumer legislation and professional codes of conduct, as well as the emotional impact of events.

Our process is a confidential and without prejudice process. It is intended to provide an informal way to explore resolution and find a way to resolve the complaint and issues raised. Neither party is permitted to use the content of the mediation or any letters, emails or documents in any subsequent court proceedings. The VCMS will not keep records of the proposals and discussions that have taken place during mediation once the mediation has concluded. The VCMS will also not keep any other paper or electronic document received including records, invoices, emails, letters and call summaries, and neither party will be entitled to these during or in conclusion of the process. The only document which will be kept is any final signed agreement/outcome as well as basic data information. The mediators and resolution managers are impartial and will not provide any evidence, whether written or otherwise, of the proposals and discussions in mediation, this includes not being required to attend court to give evidence.

The VCMS process is intended to be informal and you do not need legal representation. You can appoint a family member or friend to be your representative if you would prefer to do so.

### **WHO CAN COMPLAIN TO US?**

Anyone individual owner can refer their complaint to the VCMS if it relates to a veterinary practice. Practices can also contact us for advice.

### **WHAT COMPLAINTS CAN WE HELP WITH?**

We can help resolve complaints about the service you have received or care provided to your animals. The VCMS is able to mediate complaints and concerns raised by individual animal owners regarding veterinary professionals and their practice.





## WHEN CAN A COMPLAINT BE MADE?

The first step is to contact the practice and tell them you are unhappy as soon as possible.

Every practice should have a formal complaints procedure and a person responsible for dealing with complaints. Many complaints procedures will need an owner to put their complaint in writing.

You may contact the VCMS at any stage if you wish to speak to someone impartial during this initial complaint process. However, the VCMS will not be able to mediate until the practice's own complaint procedure has been exhausted. It is worth noting:

- That practices try to resolve your complaint within four weeks of being made (following guidance issued by their representative organisations). If your veterinary practice does not respond within four weeks, you can refer your complaint to the VCMS, but we would recommend owners contact the practice to ask for a timescale.
- If your veterinary practice's final response to your complaint does not resolve your complaint, then contact the VCMS as soon as possible.

VCMS would recommend that you refer your complaint to the VCMS within six months of the date of your vet's final response, but we can accept a complaint into our process if the final response from the practice has been given in the last 12 months.

## HOW CAN A COMPLAINT BE MADE?

If your complaint cannot be resolved with the practice, then you can refer your complaint to VCMS by:

- Telephoning us on [0345 040 5834](tel:03450405834) Monday – Friday between 8am - 6pm
- Emailing us at [enquiries@vetmediation.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@vetmediation.co.uk)
- Completing the complaint form at [www.vetmediation.co.uk](http://www.vetmediation.co.uk)
- Writing to us at VCMS, 6 Market Square, Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, CM23 3UZ

## WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

- We will ask you to complete a form to allow the practice to release your veterinary records and any all relevant information
- We will contact the practice and invite them to engage in mediation. If they agree to come into mediation, we will confirm when the practice has sent us all the information relevant to your complaint
- We will then contact you and the practice to discuss a solution
- When a solution is found, we will help to implement this and if any action is required we will embody this in a Mediation Agreement which will be passed to each party to sign as a confidential and concluding agreement.
- If the complaint is not resolved within this phase, the VCMS Resolution Manager will provide information on possible, alternative routes.





A step-by-step explanation of our complaint handling process is set out later in this document. Importantly, we will also ask you how we have done and listen to your feedback to continuously improve the mediation service. Please visit [www.vetmediation.co.uk](http://www.vetmediation.co.uk) for more details. A copy of the scheme rules is available on request.

Either party can end the mediation process at any time. Participating in mediation does not restrict your right to take further legal action, but we do ask that neither party do so while the mediation process is ongoing.

## EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

VCMS are committed to eliminating unlawful discrimination and to promoting equality and diversity within our policies, practices and procedures, including the delivery of our mediation service. We shall treat everyone equally and with the same attention, courtesy and respect regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and maternity or caring responsibility. If it would assist for us to make reasonable adjustments to our process, please let us know and we can discuss this further.

## WHAT COMPLAINTS CAN'T WE HELP WITH?

Some complaints involving professionals and practices that are regulated by the RCVS, cannot be mediated by VCMS such as:

### Serious professional misconduct

If there is any concern that the professionals involved are unfit to practice or behaving inappropriately, VCMS will immediately refer the matter to the RCVS. The RCVS regulates all veterinary professionals in the UK and authorises them to practice. Please visit [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk) for more information and to raise your concern.

### Complaints where the practice feels the complaint is not suitable for mediation

Mediation is a voluntary process. If a party decides not to engage or withdraw from mediation at any stage, the mediation is closed.

The VCMS cannot assist with complaints where:

- The circumstances of the complaint arose over 12 months ago and no complaint has been raised with the practice
- The owner is not an individual (i.e. they are a professional keeper of animals)
- The complainant is not the legal owner of the animal
- The complainant has accepted a full and final resolution from the practice
- The veterinary practice is based outside the UK.

If you are unsure whether your circumstances fall within these areas, please call us for more information.





## FURTHER INFORMATION

- RCVS - [www.rcvs.org.uk](http://www.rcvs.org.uk)
- Blue Cross Pet Bereavement Support - [www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support](http://www.bluecross.org.uk/pet-bereavement-support)
- PDSA - [www.pdsa.org.uk](http://www.pdsa.org.uk)
- British Veterinary Association - [www.bva.co.uk/You-and-your-vet/Advice-for-pet-owners](http://www.bva.co.uk/You-and-your-vet/Advice-for-pet-owners)
- Guidance for Pet Owners - [www.bva.co.uk/You-and-your-vet/BVA-advice-leaflets](http://www.bva.co.uk/You-and-your-vet/BVA-advice-leaflets)
- Kennel Club - [www.thekennelclub.org.uk](http://www.thekennelclub.org.uk)
- Council of the Cat Fancy - [www.gccfcats.org](http://www.gccfcats.org)

