



Your Winter Update From VCMS

It has been another busy 12 months for the Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS). Following the publication of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) provisional findings and decision report in October, we have been carefully reviewing, digesting and analysing all the information contained in the report and the changes being proposed, while doing all we can to prepare and reassure vets ahead of the transition that may lie ahead – particularly around how complaints and concerns are dealt with.

While those changes and consultations are rumbling along in the background, we continue as ever to provide mediation support to vets and pet owners. Below you'll find a summary of our latest report and the trends we are seeing.

YOUR MEDIATIONS - IN NUMBERS

- **2025 saw the highest engagement rate to date**, with over 80% of practices agreeing to engage in VCMS mediation. Q4 saw an average engagement rate of 87%
- **10% increase in enquiries** during the second half of the VCMS year (May to October 2025)
- The **most common complaints** referred to the VCMS in 2025 were related to the diagnostic pathway, unexpected outcomes, consent conversations and the decision-making process
- **Fees and charges** were the core issue in just one in seven complaints (14%) which is consistent with previous years

- **Emerging trends** – complaints around record issues and disagreements over treatment plans saw significant increases
- **26% of cases went to mediation**, and 940 mediations were concluded in 2025
- VCMS maintained a **resolution rate of 78%**.

Jennie Jones, head of the Veterinary Client Mediation Service, said: “2025 was a year of two halves. The early part of the year saw slightly lower activity levels than 2024, but from Spring onwards, there was a continued increase in enquiries and practice engagement.

“The increase in enquiries could be linked to greater consumer awareness of the VCMS following the CMA vet industry investigation, and even more veterinary practices directing pet owners to the service. Within this landscape, resolution rates and satisfaction feedback have remained steady, which is encouraging amid a challenging period for both consumers and veterinary professionals.

“There’s a lot of talk in the press about costs – including a BBC Panorama on the matter which aired in January - but complaints involving only issues regarding fees and charges were actually a tiny part of our work during the last quarter. Complaints about costs tend to link back to pet owners feeling informed and able to make good decisions which incorporate the clinical veterinary care options and their wider family needs. This can include financial factors but also prognosis, expectations and their personal circumstances.

“There were some interesting trends in terms of the cases we have been handling in 2025 too which we continue to share to help improve the interactions between pet owners and veterinary practices. Our analysis highlighted that pet owner engagement in decisions on treatment plans was a key aspect in many complaints. This is an area where we can share qualitative insight with vets and pet owners to help improve communication and clarity, particularly about agreeing clear expectations and collaborative decision making.

“For example, we know in an emotional situation, owners will sometimes say “whatever it takes” about the care of their animals, but it is essential that the full context of the family’s and patient’s needs are clear and understood so the pet owner can make an informed, confident decision. Effective client communication is the bedrock of building strong, trust-based relations with pet owners, and it helps avoid confusion or misunderstandings becoming complaints down the road, which can be very stressful for all involved.”

MEDIATION IN ACTION

When two-year-old lop rabbit Lola was taken to the out of hours vet, her owner felt that she wasn’t provided with an appropriate consultation. The treatment plan was not properly discussed and agreed, and Lola’s owner was not given information about the potential causes of her rabbit’s skin condition nor was she advised to monitor the animal, which then died at home.

The Complaint

The customer had a number of complaints about the out of hours vet service she received. Firstly, the treatment plan was not discussed or agreed to by the rabbit’s owner. The vet did not discuss with her that the skin condition could have been caused by her rabbit’s accommodation, and she wasn’t advised to



monitor the rabbit at home. Some specific decisions were made without the vet seeking her consent, and she was only informed after the event.

The customer was very distrustful of the care her rabbit had received, even speculating that the vet had overdosed the animal, although this would have been difficult to prove.


Secondly, there was no breakdown of costs on the bill, and the customer believed she had been charged for overnight hospitalisation that never happened.

In responding to the customer's complaint, the practice acknowledged that there were a number of areas where the service for Lola could have been improved. They also provided a written response to the customer to attempt to answer the questions she had raised and offered a small goodwill gesture plus an offer to refund the money for the medication prescribed.

Finding a Resolution

The VCMS listened to the customer and explained to them what a goodwill gesture was, and this helped them understand what the vet practice was offering to resolve the dispute. The customer then accepted the offer. As an additional goodwill gesture, the practice waived the outstanding £374 balance to bring the customer's account to zero.

Summary



We sometimes take for granted that customers understand the terminology we use to try and resolve complaints and disputes – such as 'goodwill gesture' – but it's important not to assume that. In this case, the customer didn't understand what was meant by this term, and therefore wasn't able to reach a settlement with the vet practice initially. Ensuring communications are inclusive in the way they are worded by using plain English and explaining any legal or technical language can help to avoid any undue stress or confusion.

TRAINING

VCMS offers a variety of training options from our annual programme of online courses to bespoke packages for practices. Training sessions draw on our experience of mediating real complaints, and are full of practical advice and tips that you can use in the day-to-day running of your practice. You can find our latest programme of events here (add in link).

No time for training? No budget for training? No problem. We also offer a series of free 30-minute bite-sized webinars which you can watch on your lunchbreak or at home to brush up on your complaints and dispute resolution skills. Contact Sue Clark sclark@nockolds.co.uk for more information.

WEBINAR: 22 APRIL | 12.30PM

Policy to Practice - Making a Complaint Policy a Friend for Your Practice and Pet Owners

- The benefits of having a clear complaints policy: trust, transparency, and improved service.
- Principles of a friendly, clear, and accessible policy.
- Encouragement to view complaints as opportunities rather than burdens.
- Techniques for de-escalating tense situations with pet owners.

Book your place by emailing [here](#).