

SPVS

Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons

A Division of the BVA

Seventy years of working for the vet in practice

Aligning clinical and management research interests

Supporting the RVC in its attempts to standardise diagnostic data is an important strand of SPVS policy and it could revolutionise practice, says **NICK LLOYD**.

SPVS IS PROUD to announce its support for the RVC's VetCompass (Veterinary Companion Animal Surveillance System) project, set up to share primary practice clinical data for large-scale epidemiological research.

SPVS believes primary practices across the UK hold vital data on disorders affecting the animals they treat, but is not being used in a meaningful way to inform national disease levels. VetCompass collects and collates de-identified clinical data from participating practices into a single, secure research database. This is then analysed to identify risk factors for a range of conditions as well as disorder prevalence levels.

SPVS also considers that, as well as national animal welfare gains,

there are several direct management benefits that offer UK veterinary practices a compelling reason to join VetCompass. To date, much of the information recorded in veterinary practice management systems (PMS) has been in free-text format.

Misspellings, abbreviations and a range of diagnostic terms render free-text data difficult to analyse. Even when diagnoses are correctly recorded, these are hidden in the midst of the clinical notes section and, therefore, relatively inaccessible for analysis.

VetCompass overcomes these challenges by implementing standard veterinary nomenclature (VeNom) codes within the PMS of participating practices.

These codes are a comprehensive list of standardised veterinary diagnostic terms, presenting signs, procedures and breeds that have been developed and refined by UK veterinary schools along with the PDSA and VetsNow.

Upgrade

The VetCompass project's masterstroke is to "upgrade" PMS by offering an additional text box following each episode of care where diagnoses relating to that visit are recorded. Diagnoses are rapidly chosen from a drop-down list by typing the first few letters of the desired term, speeding up note-making.

Once recorded, these standardised diagnosis terms allow rapid in-practice analysis of caseloads, with many applications. Clinical audit, as recommended by the RCVS, becomes a really useful and painless exercise. For example:

- Cases with postoperative complications can be identified, numerated and investigated for risk factors.
- Responses to protocol changes can be assessed by repeating the audit at timed intervals.
- Potential gains from planned CPD subject areas or surgical equipment purchases can be evaluated by investigating the current applicable caseload or by comparing pre and post caseloads and management.
- Clinical targets for key performance indicators (KPIs) can be set and evaluated for interventions such as routine retests for feline hyperthyroid cases or diabetics.

Recorded diagnosis terms also facilitate insurance claims completion. Para-clinical staff can use the summary diagnosis term as a claim term rather than having to divine a diagnosis from the free-text notes or by referring back to the attending veterinary surgeon.

Consultation processes are optimised as clinicians are prompted to consider

varying levels of diagnosis rather than treating presenting signs. This has the effect of encouraging case management appropriate for the diagnosis (for example, bronchitis) rather than for the less-defined presenting signs (such as coughing). A list of previous recorded diagnoses is presented when opening client records, allowing rapid review of case histories without laborious reading of extensive case notes.

Credentials

VetCompass practices are provided with client leaflets and booklets to explain the project's aims and enhance the welfare and scientific credentials of the practice. Practice clients are also invited to visit the VetCompass website (www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass) giving further information on the studies in progress as well as general outputs. Participating practices are credited for their generosity on this website, with hyperlinks back to the individual practice websites.

De-identified clinical data from participating practices are uploaded routinely to the secure VetCompass database at the RVC. Data fields shared include animal signalment fields (species, breed, sex, date of birth, colour, microchip, insured status, partial post code), clinical notes, treatment and summary diagnosis terms. No personal owner information or financial details are shared. As well as being fully compliant with the Data Protection Act, VetCompass has received ethical approval from the RVC ethics and welfare committee and the aims are supported by the RCVS.

Several PhD studies are

Compliant practice management systems:

- RX Works
- Teleos
- Vet-One

analysing VetCompass data to understand risk factors and prevalence of important conditions, such as canine cancer, canine pyoderma, canine epilepsy and canine and feline longevity. VetCompass is planned to run indefinitely, allowing animals to be followed over their entire lives, greatly enhancing the interpretation of results.

A wide range of future studies are planned that will add to the scientific body relating to companion animals and, ultimately, improve the care veterinary surgeons can offer their patients. As of March, the VetCompass database held information relating to more than 250,000 individual animals and in excess of 1.5 million individual episodes of care.

Research power

It is the research power from these numbers, even at this early stage of development, that is so convincing of the long-term impact of this project to improve how we treat our patients. As well as many individual practices, large practice groups, such as Medivet and Vets4Pets, are already members. Participation is only limited by the ability of PMS to implement the required changes.

SPVS highly recommends its members to visit the VetCompass website (www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass) and consider the potential for this project to benefit their practices. If your practice already uses a compliant PMS (see panel), then email Dan O'Neill (doneill@rvc.ac.uk) to express an interest.



Otherwise, contact your PMS provider to encourage progress in development that will lead to compliance. SPVS believes that VetCompass is one of those special win-win moments when good medicine, good welfare and good management align.

References

1. The VeNom Coding Group (2011). VeNom veterinary nomenclature. Retrieved May 26, 2011 from www.venomcoding.org
2. VetCompass (2011). VetCompass: Health surveillance for UK companion animals. Retrieved November 29, 2011 from www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass/

■ In the April edition of *The Veterinary Business Journal* we wrongly attributed the article on the psychology of confidence to Colin Thomson; the author was SPVS councillor Brian Faulkner. *VBJ* apologises for the error.

Reader Offer

Brighten up your practice with these fantastic anatomical charts!

VETERINARY TIMES has acquired a limited stock of these superbly detailed annotated charts, originally produced by the Anatomical Chart Company.

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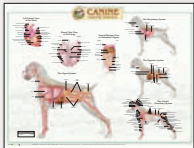
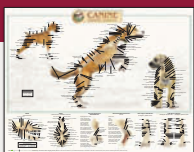
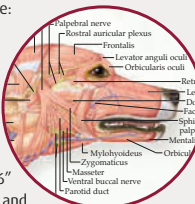


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