

98.5% of vets satisfied with complaint mediation service

Submitted by: Nockolds Solicitors

Friday, 5 June 2020

The Veterinary Client Mediation Service (VCMS), delivered by Hertfordshire-based Nockolds Solicitors' alternative dispute resolution (ADR) team, has published its 2019 report, which reveals a rise in awareness of the service, superb feedback and an increase in engagement from veterinary practices over the past year.

Since its launch in 2016, the VCMS, which is funded by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), has handled 5,477 complaint referrals from veterinary clients and practices, with a current rate of over 400 mediations per year. Awareness of the service has increased to the point where a far greater percentage of clients are contacting the VCMS directly, rather than through a direct referral from the RCVS, shining a spotlight on the service's quality, authority and continued success in helping to bring ongoing complaints to a close.

Nockolds enabled the successful conclusion of 88 per cent of complaints mediated, a rise from 86 per cent the previous year. This increased success through the use of Nockolds' proven ADR process not only bears testament to the value of mediation support for pet owners, but also for those in the veterinary profession, who already experience the daily pressures of performing their vital services for pet owners, by relieving the stress that comes with resolving a complaint.

Within VCMS mediation, 79 per cent of complaints concluded with a formal resolution and signed Mediation Agreement. The remainder were informal discussion which bought the complaint to an end. Over half of all resolutions agreed were non-financial: apologies, quality improvement or training, or further explanation to enable the client to understand and accept events. The latter suggests that opportunity exists in communication techniques to patients, indicating that empathetic communication with the pet owner heavily influences the outcome of a complaint. Anecdotal insight suggests that how a client feels about the interaction with the practice or how their complaints is handled is a key factor, rather than a focus on the clinical aspects of the concern.

The report finds that practice engagement in mediation has increased, with vets declining mediation in only nine per cent of VCMS referrals. Responses submitted by practices suggest that, where a practice has declined, mediation has been considered on a case by case basis.

The feedback from practices regarding the VCMS process has been excellent. Where a resolution is agreed through mediation, almost all practices were satisfied or entirely satisfied with the outcome. When surveyed, the vast majority of practices noted the ease of contacting the VCMS, and recorded that they considered the service fair, productive, helpful and efficient.

Jennie Jones, Head of VCMS and Partner at Nockolds Resolution, said, "As the government continues to explore the use and impact of mediation in professional regulation, the VCMS will continue to inform this exploration based on the early use of mediation in the resolution of veterinary complaints. We look forward to sharing these insights and continuing to support the veterinary professions, practices and clients during 2020 and beyond."

With targets met, feedback received and improvements made, 2020 is already set to be another successful year for the VCMS. This year, the team will explore how the service can encourage engagement by more veterinary practices, in particular, consulting with practices and professional bodies to understand and address any ongoing barriers in complaints suitable for mediation.

<https://www.nockolds.co.uk/services/nockolds-resolution-adr/>

ENDS

For more information please contact Sue Clark 07919 158962/ sclark@nockolds.co.uk

Notes to editors: Nockolds has offices in London and Bishops Stortford and dates back to 1831. The firm has 13 partners and over 120 members of staff. Nockolds has a Lexcel Quality mark, numerous listings in the 'Legal 500' and 'Chambers & Partners', the two legal directories of who's who in the law, a Gold Investors in People award and included in the Sunday Times' 100 Best Small Companies to Work for Award.