

## Records and the Large Animal Practitioner

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Most veterinarians and veterinary technicians enjoy and relish the hands-on aspects of veterinary practice. Here they most frequently sense that their care and interventions make a difference in improving the health and welfare of their animal patients, as well as increase productivity in the case of an animal agriculture enterprise. If you asked a majority in the veterinary community, "How enthusiastic are you about veterinary records?" I strongly suspect that the majority would reply they understand the importance of records, but seldom place as much emphasis on the medical record as they should.

Appropriate and accurate records are key components in the communication and planning of animal care. Adequate records are important to ensure that owners understand what was done and why, as well as to ensure seamless animal care within the veterinary community.

Requirements for veterinary medical records are addressed in the board's regulations in title 49 of the Pennsylvania Code, at § 31.22. In addition, section 27.1 of the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act, 63 P.S. 485.27a, addresses veterinary medical records.

Proper documentation of the care and recommendations that you or your staff makes are requirements under your professional licensure. In small-animal private practice, individual animal records have been the standard of practice for many years. However, within large animal practice, veterinary care is often less well documented. I hope this short article will re-enforce the need for large animal practitioners to examine to proceed with the proper care and treatment of the animal.

Records shall be maintained for a minimum of three years from the date the animal was last treated by the veterinarian. Section 27.1 (a) of the Veterinary Medicine Practice Act provides: "a veterinarian subject to the

provisions of this section, shall as required by regulation of the board, keep or cause to be kept a written record of all animals or groups of animals, as the case may be, receiving veterinary services, and provide a summary or copy of that record to the owner of the animals when requested." The act further provides that these records may be maintained in a written or electronic format.

It is not the board's intention to drown veterinary practices in paper, but it is important for all veterinarians to realize that veterinary care, be that large or small animal, must have documentation. Without some form of documentation, it can be impossible to verify that a reasonable medical diagnosis was reached, that proper veterinary instructions were provided, and that a rational prognosis was given. Without any real detail as to the format, the Veterinary Practice Act does state that electronic records are an acceptable means of storing veterinary medical information.

At the minimum, records should contain: date, an ID or ID for the group, pertinent physical findings, tentative diagnosis, any relevant diagnostic information, concise information for course of treatment or therapy, and identification of practitioner. Equine practitioners dealing with individual animals should be able to meet these with their medical record keeping system and ensure that they are in compliance with Pennsylvania regulation.

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The basic requirements of records are contained in § 31.22 of the board's regulations. Subsection (1) provides that "A veterinarian shall maintain veterinary medical records of an animal so that any veterinarian coming into a veterinary practice may, by reading the veterinary medical record of a particular animal, be able requirements fairly easily."

Equine or large animal production practitioners may find these requirements a little more daunting when dealing with large numbers in herds or flocks. Further, in the case of production species, incorporation of times necessary to ensure adequate meat or egg withdrawal or milk withholding, as well as incorporate any special requirements necessary under the 1994 Animal Medical Drug Use and Care Act (AMDUCA) must be included.

Concise and easy to follow protocols are encouraged when dealing with large numbers of animals in a production setting. A recordkeeping system that incorporates simple-to-understand protocols would be acceptable as a means of dealing with many of the recordkeeping requirements for routine veterinary medical and surgical procedures.

Large animal practitioners who wish to develop protocols can find many templates on the Internet and in the veterinary literature. Producer-acceptable protocols are usually those developed by the veterinarian in collaboration with their clients. Carefully conceived and written protocols can help ensure better animal care and compliance by owners. Further, these protocols can help to fulfill the requirement for veterinary care documentation within the board's regulations.

For some time, records in large-animal care have been a challenge for the veterinary community. In the current climate when food safety, animal well-being, and consumer concerns are strongly advocated, it is in the best interest of both the veterinarian and his/her clients to carefully follow good procedures for veterinary medical records.

### Board Meeting Dates

- July 9, Harrisburg
- Sept. 11, Harrisburg
- Oct. 16, Harrisburg
- Dec.10, Harrisburg

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The bureau will take all reasonable steps to safeguard personal information contained in your licensure records. We realize that many of you use your home addresses on the licensure records maintained by the bureau. However, given the uncertainty over what the Right-to-Know Act requires, neither the bureau nor the board that issues your license can guarantee the confidentiality of the address shown on your licensing record. Therefore, if you have a personal security concern, we recommend that you consider what many our licensees have already done: use a business address or box number as the official address on licensure records.

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