

Further information on the complaint process can be found on the Council's website: www.vetcouncil.org.nz

The Veterinary Council of New Zealand

The Veterinary Council is the regulator of the veterinary profession, operating under the Veterinarians Act 2005. The purpose of the Veterinarians Act is to protect the public interest by ensuring that veterinarians are competent to practise. The Council sets the standards of veterinary practice and so is able to assess any complaint against those standards.

The New Zealand Veterinary Association

This organization represents the interests of veterinarians. It may be able to comment on the appropriateness of fees charged, and assist with resolving some matters with the veterinarian.

Fees Issue - Disputes Tribunal

A dispute which is only about the fees charged for services is generally seen as a business matter between yourself and the veterinarian. The Disputes Tribunal deals with disputes between two parties where the amounts are up to \$7,500 or \$12,000 if everyone involved agrees. The fees for filing a disputes tribunal claim range from \$30 to \$100, and vary with the amount claimed.

FURTHER INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

Complaints Assessment Committee

The Veterinary Council of New Zealand

PO Box 10-563, Wellington

Tel: 04 473 9600

Fax: 04 473 8869

Email: cac@vetcouncil.org.nz

www.vetcouncil.org.nz

Other contacts:

New Zealand Veterinary Association

PO Box 11-212, Wellington

Tel: 04 471 0484

Email: nzva@vets.org.nz

www.vets.org.nz

Consumers Institute of New Zealand

Private Bag 6996, Wellington

Tel: 04 384 7963

For online information: www.consumer.org.nz

Ministry of Consumer Affairs

Level 7, 33 Bowen Street

PO Box 1473, Wellington, New Zealand

Tel: 04 474 2750

www.consumeraffairs.govt.nz

Disputes Tribunal

Disputes Tribunals are listed under the Ministry of Justice in the Blue Pages of your telephone book or online at www.justice.govt.nz

A guide for
consumers of
veterinary services



The Veterinary Council of New Zealand

If you are unhappy about the service you have received from a veterinarian, help is available. This leaflet explains how to avoid problems, what to do if there are problems and how the complaints process of the Veterinary Council works.

How to avoid potential problems when your animal receives veterinary treatment

Ensure that you are fully informed before any treatment is given to your animal.

You can expect:

- a thorough examination of your animal
- to be advised of treatment options
- to be advised of the likely outcome
- to be advised of the recommended treatment
- to be given estimates (or quotes) for the cost of the proposed treatment (NB: these may need to be modified during the course of any treatment)
- to be made aware of any significant risks of treatment
- to be involved in deciding the course of treatment
- to be offered referral to veterinarians with more experience or specialist skills if appropriate
- that a positive response is given to any request from you for a second opinion

You should talk to your veterinarian first

If you have any concerns about the service that you have received, please contact your veterinarian first. Either talk to the veterinarian or the manager of the practice in person, or write a letter outlining your concerns. If talking in person you should make an appointment so that time can be set aside to specifically discuss your concerns.

Making a complaint to the Veterinary Council

Any person is entitled to make a formal written complaint to the Veterinary Council about a veterinarian. Through this process complainants play an influential part in the maintenance and improvement of veterinary standards. A sub-committee of the Council (the Complaints Assessment Committee or CAC) considers all complaints and can undertake an investigation. There is no charge for making a complaint. There is no provision for compensatory payment to complainants.

The CAC considers all complaints, and decides whether to investigate further. It does not investigate matters that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Council, such as a contract or employment dispute, a complaint essentially about fees or compensation, or a matter that does not specifically involve a veterinarian, or if there are insufficient grounds to investigate the complaint.

If the CAC decides to investigate it first seeks a written response from the veterinarian to the complainant's letter. This response is then sent to the complainant who has the right of reply to the veterinarian's explanation. The Committee usually assesses the complaint by considering the written statements received, but will sometimes meet with parties involved. Further information such as expert opinion may be sought if needed.

At the end of the investigation the Committee meets to consider all the relevant evidence, and to decide whether there is any or sufficient evidence of a breach of the Veterinarians Code of Professional Conduct. All parties are informed in writing about decisions taken.

The actions the CAC can take

The Committee can take several courses of action. It may decide not to take the matter any further, it may provide advice to the veterinarian on improvements to his or her methods, service or behaviour. It may suggest a mediation process between complainant and veterinarian. It may recommend that the VCNZ requires competence or medical assessment of the veterinarian; or in serious cases of professional misconduct it may lay charges against the veterinarian which are heard and decided upon by Judicial Committee of the Council. If the veterinarian is found guilty the Judicial Committee can impose penalties such as censure, fines, suspension, conditions of practice, audits and retraining.