



## Veterinary After Hours Protocol

### COMBINED VETERINARY AFTER-HOURS SERVICE ( )

#### PREAMBLE

The purpose of sharing after hours is to allow greater leisure time for all veterinarians in the district and should result in an excellent service to clients. The following protocol provides a basis to conduct the service ethically and should be adhered to by all participants. Any deviation from it should be by mutual discussion by all practices. The protocol is to be reviewed at each roster meeting for fine tuning & general discussion. Any problems or disagreements should be raised promptly for early resolution.

It is important that any associates or locums are aware of the arrangements and have viewed this document. The participants pages should be kept handy for reference to phone numbers and opening hours – please notify any changes to these numbers as soon as possible.

#### THE PHONE NUMBER FOR CLIENTS TO RING

(put this number on your answering machine):

#### REGULAR OPENING HOURS

Practice Name	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun

#### HOURS OF OPERATION

Weekends consist of Friday night from closing time of each hospital to opening time Saturday, then from Saturday closing time of each hospital until opening time Monday morning. Variability in opening hours means there are times when some hospitals may receive calls while still open, or may refer patients to open hospitals if appointments available.

#### INPATIENTS

Responsibility for hospital in-patients (from the previous day etc) remains with the practice of origin unless specific arrangements have been made with another practice to cover their care. The veterinarian in charge of the patient must make their own arrangements for contact with the owner during operating hours. The duty veterinarian will not be required to liaise between owners and other veterinarians, except as specified below.

#### FEEES (from )

All fees & costs will be as per the individual clinic's normal schedule.

It is acceptable to charge an "in-hours" consultation if a call occurs during regular opening hours.

Small animals: IN HOURS \$ ; OUT OF HOURS \$

Large animals: IN HOURS \$ ; OUT OF HOURS \$

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The duty veterinarian must make efforts to establish who the usual/preferred consulting veterinarian is for each client, even if the client has attended the duty practice before.

Clients who attend another clinic after hours are to be referred to their usual clinic as soon as that practice resumes business hours. It should be explained to the client that emergency after hours' attention only is being provided, and that the client should consult their usual veterinarian for further problems. If the problem is severe or ongoing, then the client should be advised that the usual veterinarian will resume the case at the first available normal hours.

Although it is the client's prerogative to maintain the animal in the care of the practice providing emergency care, the spirit of the service is to encourage clients to return to their normal practice, unless the animal's wellbeing may be threatened by such a move (eg tick paralysis, severe pneumonia etc). Fitness for travel shall be assessed by the treating (duty) veterinarian. If the client elects not to transfer, they will be required to notify their usual veterinarian.

A copy of the After Hours Consultation Record (which must be clear, complete and concise) is to be emailed to the usual veterinarian immediately and the client should be advised that the record will have been passed on. In some cases a phone call may be necessary to discuss the case. This is regardless of whether the animal was treated as an inpatient or outpatient.

Telephone advice, if detailed, should also be recorded and forwarded to the usual veterinarian in a similar manner.

The duty veterinarian should not quote on cases requiring ongoing treatment by the usual veterinarian. It is recognised however that in some cases, it would be beneficial to give an estimated range of costs, especially if an owner is considering financial euthanasia. If it is felt that contacting the usual veterinarian will help in the treatment of an animal particularly if it is an ongoing case, then attempts should be made to contact that veterinarian. It is anticipated that this should be the exception rather than the norm.

It is up to the Principal of each practice to ensure that associates or locums have adequate experience or ability to deal with all emergencies, or provide adequate support to them. Any comments about another veterinarian's treatment of an animal or client must be addressed to the Principal or Practice Manager. It is inevitable in a system such as this that difference of opinion will arise. Accepting this or dealing with it constructively is essential for ongoing harmonious operation of the system.

In the case of dealing with post surgical complications from another veterinarian's case, the duty veterinarian should check with the client whom they would prefer to deal with the case. Then, if the client desires, try to contact the usual veterinarian and give them the option of dealing with the complication. If unavailable, then the duty veterinarian should proceed with any treatment required. Any life saving treatment however should not be delayed. Examples of this sort of case are dehiscence, post-surgical peritonitis, a slipped cast, etc.

Following completion of treatment, the client file should be deactivated immediately so that no routine mailings or follow up calls occur.

## INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Each practice shall provide information on their after-hours contact methods (phone messages, digital platforms) to advise the public of the appropriate telephone number to ring. Clients should be advised that the service is a combined after- hours service to avoid confusion for clients.

### A suggested message is:

**"You have reached [ ] . The clinic is now closed. For urgent veterinary attention please contact the [ ] Combined Veterinary Emergency Service on [ ] , I repeat [ ] . Please be aware this is a combined veterinary service and a veterinarian from a different clinic may answer your call".**

The administrator of the system is to ensure the service phone is diverted to the correct mobile number for the practice on duty for that night/weekend. Each clinic is to advise the [ ] administrator as to the appropriate mobile number to use, especially if there is any change to the usual routine. Any change to the phone number for the service must be immediately reported to all clinics.

The duty veterinarian will ensure that their mobile phone is available and answered promptly at all times. Duty veterinarian is to answer the phone as "XX Combined Veterinary Emergency Service". Clear directions must be given to get to the on-duty practice and payment protocol must be discussed up-front.

Large animal calls – the answering veterinarian is to take a message, then contact the duty large animal veterinarian to return the call.

## ROSTER DIVISION

Small animal duty will be shared on a      -way basis in a rotating system between

Large animal calls will be shared on a      -way basis between

It is expected that each clinic will cover its allotted shifts unless arrangements have been made with another clinic to cover for them. All clinics must be notified of any changes to the roster. This change must be confirmed in writing with the phone administrator.

Sharing holidays between practices is permitted. All practices must be notified (as for a roster change) and confirmed in writing with the      administrator. If changeover of the phone diversion is required whilst practices are closed, this shall occur at a time convenient to the administrator. The administrator will notify the practices involved of any change to this time.

Public holidays are to be shared equally amongst practices. The on-duty clinic should cover the associated weekend with each public holiday (if Friday &/or Monday). That weekend is to be included in that practice's share of weekends.

The yearly roster should be distributed 6 months in advance. The public holiday roster should be distributed 12 months in advance. Regular reviews are advisable to ensure all parties are happy with the system. For stability, changes in the roster division are to occur no more frequently than once every three years, (unless extreme circumstances occur) with at least 6 months' notice before implementation.

## CHRISTMAS & EASTER

These holidays will be shared evenly between practices.

## OVERFLOW

If the duty veterinarian cannot attend an urgent call due to other work commitments, they must endeavour to contact another veterinarian to attend that call. They should try to contact one from their own practice first, if possible, otherwise one of the other practitioners.

Should a veterinarian be called in to help the duty veterinarian, it is important this is given absolute priority over other commitments. It should be recognised that the occasional interruption in this manner will be less intrusive than normal after hours' duties.

## PATIENT TRANSFER

It is the responsibility of the client to organise transportation of the patient from the duty veterinarian to his or her usual veterinary hospital. This should occur as soon as possible after the commencement of normal hours. The client must attend the duty clinic prior to transfer to finalise their account. Patient transfer is NOT the responsibility of either the duty or the regular veterinary hospital.

A courtesy call and patient history should be provided to the receiving veterinary hospital as early as possible.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

No horse that is not currently vaccinated for Hendra Virus will be attended by the after-hours veterinarian. Current vaccination should be confirmed by sighting a certificate from the Hendra Registry, or by a search of the Hendra Registry prior to attending. Practices should regularly remind their clients of this requirement.

Treatment of injured/sick/orphaned wildlife is not the responsibility of the duty veterinarian unless a WIRES coordinator agrees to pay the After-Hours Consultation Fee. Members of the Public are to be directed to the WIRES phone system or National Parks and Wildlife Service. For badly injured animals, a WIRES coordinator may be called directly from the list provided to each practice by WIRES (numbers not to be shared with the Public).

Injured or unwell stray animals must be seen and provided basic emergency/first aid/relief of suffering treatment. This is irrespective of whether or not the finder is willing to pay the after-hours call out fee. The duty veterinarian is not required to visit or transport injured strays.

Healthy stray animals are not the responsibility of the      . Callers to be referred to the Council.

No duty veterinarian will be required to do a house visit for small animals. All after-hours small animal consultations will be performed at the duty veterinarian's practice premises.

## CHARGING

It is up to the duty veterinarian to charge for and collect fees for all work performed whilst the animal is in their care. All clients must be informed of payment policies before the consultation occurs. For clients who are unable to pay, the veterinarian may elect to proceed with basic “relief of suffering” (eg euthanasia) free-of-charge.

## DECLARATION

I agree to adhere to the protocols as detailed above.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (practice principal/s)    Date: \_\_\_\_\_

For: \_\_\_\_\_ (hospital)

## Combined Veterinary After-Hours Service | Participants

Practice Name:	
Practice Owner/Manager/Admin names:	
Practice email:	
Practice street address:	
Clinic Phone:	
Clinic Mobile:	
Key contact name:	
Home ph:	
Mobile ph:	

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