



Guidelines for 'Major Surgery' to be undertaken

The purpose of this document is to provide general guidance to registered veterinary practitioners who undertake major surgery.

Background

The Veterinary Practice Act 2003 at section 64, defines 'major surgery' as;

- a) according to current standards of veterinary science, should not be undertaken without the administration of an anaesthetic (other than a local anaesthetic) to an animal, or
- b) involves a spinal anaesthetic.

Section 65 of the Act, **Premises required to be licensed as a veterinary hospital**, states 'a person must not perform major surgery on an animal except at premises that are the subject of a veterinary hospital licence that authorises major surgery of the type concerned to be carried out.

The Board has established guidelines for the licensing of both small and large animal hospitals, see hospital licensing on the Board's website at www.vpb.nsw.gov.au

Notwithstanding sections 64 and 65 above, at section 65 (2) of the Act it states 'it is a defence to a prosecution if the defendant (veterinary practitioner) establishes that it was necessary to perform major surgery on the animal concerned at a place other than a licensed hospital because of one or more of the following reasons;

- (a) the major surgery was performed in an emergency and there was no time to move the animal to a veterinary hospital,
- (b) it was impractical to move the animal to a veterinary hospital because of the size or type of the animal,
- (c) it was dangerous to the health of the animal to move it to a veterinary hospital.

The intent of the legislation is not to reduce availability of veterinary services and increase costs by restricting procedures involving major surgery that are now performed on farms and comply with current standards of veterinary practice.

The purpose of these guidelines is not to provide a list of those procedures but to provide further meaning to points a), b) and c) above.

The Board interprets 'impractical' in b) above, to mean that the economic value of the animal can be considered when deciding whether to move the animal to a licensed hospital.

The cost of the transport, cost of the surgery and cost of post operative care and likely prognosis, when considered, may prohibit such a move because it was commercially impractical.

The welfare of the animal must not be compromised. For example, movement of unhandled horses, not accustomed to transport, may impose an unnecessary risk to the health of the animal 65 (1) (c) above.



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All NSW registered veterinary practitioners are legally bound by the Code of Professional Conduct (Schedule 2 of the Veterinary Practice Act Regulations 2006) and ultimately, the veterinary practitioner will decide if they will perform surgery using a general or spinal anaesthetic (major surgery) outside of a licensed veterinary hospital with due consideration with the Code.

The Code of Professional Conduct requires compliance with regard to the following;

1. Basic principles of professional conduct
2. Welfare of animals must be considered
3. No refusal of pain relief
4. Knowledge of current standards of practice
5. Utilisation of skills of colleagues
6. Professional conduct
7. Informed consent
8. Availability to care for an animal
9. Referrals and second opinions
10. Provision of records
11. Return of records
12. Confidentiality
13. Skills, knowledge and equipment of assistants
14. Compliance with codes or rules of animals sporting organisations
15. Records
16. Fees for veterinary services
17. Certification by veterinary practitioners
18. Correction of genetic defects
19. Special interest areas
20. Supply of restricted substances
21. Inducements

Major surgery must only be undertaken in compliance with sections 64 and 65 of the Veterinary Practice Act 2003 and the Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct.

Any enquires regarding this information should be directed to the Registrar of the Board.