

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The emergence of multi-drug resistant bacteria within human and veterinary healthcare has brought the concept 'cleanliness' to the fore. Public and professional consideration of cleanliness is long overdue, but in the absence of enforceable standards in veterinary practice there is a wide variation in what is deemed acceptable. Our varied roles as a veterinary surgeons and nurses has taken us into a wide variety of veterinary practices, some of them demonstrating exceptional levels, others not so good. Practices will have to take this much more seriously in the future, not least because responsible antimicrobial use is now regarded as a professional responsibility by the RCVS and hygiene is a core part of the Practice Standards Scheme.

The aims and objectives of this project were to give vets and nurses a basis on which to create their own individual protocols for their practices. We hope that personalizing the guidelines to the individual practice will stimulate discussion within the practice team and emphasise the importance of hygiene to the whole practice.

It can be daunting to create comprehensive protocols and many areas of cleaning and disinfection may be overlooked. We have worked methodically to (hopefully) cover all the vital aspects. These guidelines take into consideration all areas of the practice environment, as well as furniture and staff attire. They will also serve as a good 'review' document for practices who already have cleaning protocols in place, but which may require an update.

The document has certainly made us consider our actions within our practices, with the use of stethoscopes being a good example. These are used several times daily, but how often are they cleaned, and where do we place them in between patients? Around our necks? And does this make them another potential source of contamination? There are many other examples where consideration of the risks has changed how we work.

We have tried to keep these guidelines as practical, and realistic, as possible, and as always we welcome your comments and feedback.

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These guidelines should help practices working towards the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme. Pam is Acting Lead Assessor of the RCVS PSS, and Tim and Louise have personally prepared for RCVS PSS inspections within their own working hospitals. All the authors are thus very familiar with the PSS expectations, and it was with these inspections in mind that the guidelines were written. We hope our guidelines will provide a useful resource for the planned new Infection Control module of the new modular Practice Standards.

The Infection control Module of the new PSS has rightly been given great prominence, being part of the Team & Professional Responsibility Award, the Patient Consultation Service Award and the In-patient service Award. If a practice wants to achieve outstanding in any of these Awards they need to be outstanding in Infection Control.

Clinical governance is an important aspect of veterinary practice life. This involves reflecting, analyzing and improving our professional practice, and encompasses infection control protocols and practices to benefit our patients. These procedures need to be in place for the safety of our patients, their owners, and our colleagues. These guidelines will help practices create effective guidelines, protocols and audit procedures as part of clinical governance.

We have tried to keep these guidelines as practical, and realistic, as possible, and as always we welcome your comments and feedback.