VNs ‘vital’ to ensure and maintain high hygiene standards

EILEEN GREEN reports exclusively on a self-audit tool to help practices implement effective infection control

Veterinary nurses can play a vital role in achieving and maintaining high standard of infection control, say leading veterinary professionals.

VNs are now being urged to use a free self-audit tool hygiene tool launched by the Bella Miss Foundation (BMF) – a charity that promotes prudent antimicrobial use and hygiene in human and veterinary medicine.

The tool allows a room-by-room assessment of cleanliness levels using tick sheets, helping practices to identify problems and instigate any staff training needed to ensure infection controls are in place in all areas.

Taking a lead

BMF clinical advisor Tim Nuttall, head of dermatology at the University of Edinburgh Hospital for Small Animals, said VNs were at the forefront of infection control.

“’The BMF infection control guidelines and audit tool allow them to take charge of infection control,’ Dr Nuttall said. ‘They can use the information to develop protocols ideally suited to their practice and take a lead in implementation, monitoring and compliance.

‘This nurse-led approach is likely to be much more effective than top-down measures. The best infection control guidelines are useless if not effectively implemented.’

The tool has been created by RVN Louise O’Dwyer and vet Pam Mosedale, who drew up the infection control guidelines last year.

Miss O’Dwyer, clinical director at Pet Medics in Manchester, said it was important to raise awareness about infection control so the feel there were still somethings aspects misunderstood.

“The purpose of the audit tool is to get people to think about things that may not always be considered,” she said. “It can be little things like making sure people use disinfectants at appropriate concentrations and simple procedure like emptying the bottle and cleaning it properly rather than topping it up. If you’re in a busy practice you might just top it up.”

“People have tubes of disinfectant they put thermometers or equipment in and think they are sterilizing it. It would be quite interesting to see what can be cultured from those – it’s probably far worse than people think.”

She said she hoped every practice team member would play a part in implementing infection control.

“It needs to be embraced by all staff as every individual has the potential to make an impact within his or her practice.”

Miss Mosedale said the audit tool would give practices a framework they could use on a day-to-day basis to check hygiene standards.

“It’s so easy to forget things,” she said.

“The theatre, for example, is probably absolutely spotless, but other areas may not be as clean and cleaned as regularly. The head nurse would be a person who might do the audit, but it would be up to the practice, we don’t want to be prescriptive about it.

“It’s just a matter of getting practices to think about biosecurity, hygiene and cleaning and also about how they are going to monitor it so those high standards they have at certain times are maintained all the time.”

She said the tool would enable staff to go through every room and think about each situation logically, be it in the waiting room or cleaning the end of a trethoscope.

Miss Mosedale, who last month became veterinary advisor for the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (PSS), added the new PSS scheme, taking effect in November, would include an infection control module so practices using the audit tool would have a way of showing assessors what they were achieving.

Useful resources

BMF has also produced a Clean Hands Challenge video – on YouTube at http://bit.ly/pqzQG – which explains the importance of basic hand hygiene in stopping infections, before taking viewers through a step-by-step demonstration of good washing technique. The audit tool is available at http://bit.ly/1aq6BT8 and is one of a host of useful online resources by BMF, which relies entirely on donations and is staffed by volunteers.

BMF founder Jill Miss thanked those who had supported its work and said she was grateful to Invicta Animal Health, suppliers of ChloroPrep, which printed audit tool information leaflets for BSAVA Congress.

She appealed for further donations and said she hoped all practices would consider organizing fundraising events.

“All money received would go back into raising awareness as nobody at BMF takes any money other than expenses for projects,” she said.

“The team are so dedicated – all of our trustees and advisors give up their time freely.”

Three RVNs at White Cross Vets in Manchester organised a hands-on suturing tutorial with one of the practice’s vets.

Danielle Richardson, Stacey Law and Frances Lathwaite set aside an evening with vet Kelly Whitelaw for the mentoring session.

Miss Richardson said: “We had an interest in Schedule 3 procedures and were pleased when Kelly offered to do a tutorial. She showed us first, while explaining each technique, then we all had a turn.

“We learned how to complete a surgical knot, simple interrupted, simple continuous, four suture, interlocking, intradermal and cruciate mattress. We did this on suturing pads then real turkey breasts. It was informative, we learned a lot and are very grateful to Kelly.”

Three days later, Miss Richardson, who qualified in 2013, put her new skills to the test. “I assisted Kelly on a routine bitch spay,” she said. “She coached me while I performed intradermal sutures. She said I did an amazing job – I brought the edges together and had no humps – and I felt so proud. I loved it and can’t wait to do more.”

Miss Law said she found the tutorial “very exhilarating and rewarding”.

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Nursing trio swot up on suturing

RVN Danielle Richardson proudly displays her suture work on the spayed bitch.

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