



BELLA MOSS
FOUNDATION

Why is Positive Surveillance for Nosocomial Infection Vital in Veterinary Practice



Positive surveillance for **nosocomial infections** (also known as **hospital-acquired infections** or **HAIs**) is critical in any healthcare setting, including veterinary practices, due to the significant health risks it poses to both animals and staff. Nosocomial infections are infections that are acquired while an animal is being treated in a healthcare facility, and these infections can have severe consequences if not properly detected, managed, and prevented. Here's why positive surveillance for nosocomial infections is essential:



Staff Training Material





Nosocomial Infection Monitoring

Almost all veterinary facilities believe that they don't have a problem, and yet published data for prevalence ranges from 2.8 – 34%, so the reality is that we all have a problem. Traditionally practices recognise a HAI when they see an inflamed or dirty surgical wound. However, nosocomial infections are defined as infections that arise within 48 hours of hospital admission, three days of discharge from hospital or within 30 days of a surgical procedure. They may be evidenced by an inflamed, swollen or discharging wound, but also often by any respiratory disease, vomiting, diarrhoea, cystitis, dermatitis, etc. In many situations the clinician is totally unaware of the latter scenarios. It has been shown that reported incidence of nosocomial infections increases by 30% as soon as a facility uses 'positive surveillance'. So your consent form includes additional wording:-

Dear &client

We are delighted to hear that &name is coming in to us as an inpatient for medical or surgical care. We can assure you we are dedicated to providing &name with the best possible level of care.

In light of the incidence of human 'hospital acquired infection' (HAI), we are all aware of the risk of any inpatient acquiring such an infection, subsequent to a period of hospitalisation.

A HAI, otherwise known as a 'nosocomial infection', is defined as an infectious condition which affects an inpatient in the period between '48 hours after admission and 28 days after discharge'. Such infections can present as:

- Coughs or other respiratory signs
- Gastro-intestinal infections (e.g. vomiting or diarrhoea etc.)
- Urinary signs (e.g. cystitis, increased frequency and reduced volume of urination)
- Post operative wound infections
- Fever

Research Evidence:- Stull & Wease (2015) showed that the incidence of HAI in veterinary practice ranges from 2.8-16%; Hayley (1985) demonstrated that HAI levels can be reduced by 32% by the application of positive surveillance.

At XXXXXX Veterinary Hospital we are unaware of any significant level of HAI in our patients; however, 'best practice' advises that we should be applying positive surveillance.

To that end we would like to encourage you to contact us if you are concerned that &name might be suffering from an HAI following &hisher period of hospitalisation. In this event, please either contact reception, speak to our staff at the time of any consultation or email XXXXXXXXXX.

Please be reassured that there is no reason for concern or worry; this communication is just a small part of our commitment to providing the very best possible care for &animal.

Every practice should be applying positive surveillance for HAI.





Early Detection and Prevention

> IDENTIFYING INFECTIONS EARLY

Active surveillance helps detect infections at an early stage, often before clinical signs become apparent. This allows for timely intervention, such as administering appropriate antibiotics or isolating infected animals, which can prevent the infection from spreading to other animals or staff members.

> IDENTIFYING INFECTION HOTSPOTS

By consistently monitoring infection rates, facilities can identify common sources or hotspots of infections, such as specific rooms, procedures, or patient populations that are at higher risk. This enables targeted interventions to prevent outbreaks.



Preventing Cross-Contamination

> PREVENTING SPREAD TO OTHER PATIENTS

In a veterinary setting, animals with compromised immune systems or those undergoing surgery are particularly vulnerable to infections. If an infection goes undetected, it can spread to other animals, especially in environments like boarding areas, exam rooms, or surgical suites. Positive surveillance helps prevent cross-contamination by ensuring that infected animals are isolated quickly and infection control measures are applied.

> STAFF PROTECTION

Nosocomial infections can also affect veterinary staff. Some infections may be zoonotic (able to be transmitted from animals to humans). Surveillance helps reduce the risk of staff becoming infected and potentially spreading the infection outside the practice.



Reducing Antibiotic Resistance

> CONTROLLING ANTIBIOTIC USE

Monitoring infections allows veterinary staff to identify the specific pathogens causing infections and tailor treatment appropriately. Overuse or misuse of antibiotics, a common cause of **antimicrobial resistance (AMR)**, can be mitigated by ensuring that antibiotics are only used when necessary and in appropriate doses. Positive surveillance can help prevent the inappropriate use of antibiotics and reduce the development of resistant strains.

> EFFECTIVE ANTIMICROBIAL STEWARDSHIP

By tracking patterns of infection, practices can implement better antimicrobial stewardship protocols, ensuring that they are using the right treatments for the right infections, and avoiding broad-spectrum antibiotics unless absolutely necessary.





Improving Patient Outcomes

> REDUCING MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY

Nosocomial infections can lead to serious complications, extended hospital stays, and even death. Positive surveillance allows for timely treatment and appropriate isolation measures to improve patient outcomes by preventing these infections from worsening or becoming systemic.

> OPTIMISING RECOVERY

Infections that develop post-surgery or after intensive treatment can delay recovery, increase the length of hospitalisation, and lead to additional complications. Early detection of infections enables veterinarians to treat them promptly, reducing the impact on recovery times and improving overall patient care.



Monitoring Infection Trends

> TRACKING PATTERNS OVER TIME

Positive surveillance helps track infection rates over time, providing valuable data on infection trends within the facility. This information can help determine whether infection control strategies are effective or need to be modified. For instance, if the incidence of surgical site infections increases, the facility may need to review its sterilisation procedures, surgical protocols, or postoperative care routines.

> BENCHMARKING AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Data collected through surveillance can be used to benchmark against industry standards, ensuring that the veterinary practice is adhering to best practices. Infection surveillance is a cornerstone of quality improvement programs that aim to enhance patient care.



Supporting Infection Control Protocols

> GUIDING INFECTION CONTROL MEASURES

Surveillance data can guide infection control measures, such as adjusting cleaning and disinfection protocols, modifying personal protective equipment (PPE) requirements, or improving sterilisation techniques in surgical areas. Positive surveillance provides the evidence needed to reinforce or change practices to control the spread of infections.

> STAFF TRAINING AND AWARENESS

Regular surveillance results can highlight gaps in knowledge or compliance among staff. If certain types of infections are frequently observed, it could point to the need for additional staff education or changes in hygiene practices. This ensures that all staff members are aware of and adhere to infection control measures.





Regulatory Compliance and Accreditation

> MEETING LEGAL AND REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

Many regulatory bodies, including veterinary medical associations and government health agencies, require active surveillance and reporting of nosocomial infections to ensure patient safety. Positive surveillance helps veterinary practices meet these requirements and maintain accreditation status.

> ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

Accreditation bodies, such as the **American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA)**, often have infection control standards that require regular surveillance. Facilities that meet these standards demonstrate their commitment to high-quality, evidence-based care and patient safety.



Promoting Public Confidence

> TRUST IN THE FACILITY

Clients trust veterinary practices to provide safe, effective care for their animals. Knowing that a practice is actively engaged in surveillance and taking steps to prevent and control nosocomial infections can enhance client confidence. Transparency about infection control practices can also reassure clients that their pets are receiving the best possible care in a hygienic environment.

> PUBLIC HEALTH

Some nosocomial infections, especially those caused by resistant pathogens, can pose a threat to public health. Positive surveillance ensures that practices are not only protecting the animals in their care but also minimising the potential impact on the broader community.

In summary, **positive surveillance for nosocomial infections** is crucial for maintaining a safe and effective veterinary practice. It enables early detection, helps prevent cross-contamination, optimises patient outcomes, supports infection control efforts, and ensures compliance with regulatory standards. It is a proactive approach that contributes to the overall health and safety of both animals and veterinary staff, while also safeguarding the reputation and quality of the practice.

