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PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT

(1) What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a study that collects electronic animal health records from primary veterinary practices. The VetCompass Australia project aims to identify the prevalence and severity of disease syndromes and specific diseases seen in the general population of Australian animals and to analyse the importance of potential risk factors such as breed, age and sex.

Despite concerns from veterinarians, researchers and the public of the high level of certain disorders seen within certain breeds, there is limited published information on the prevalence of diseases in companion animal populations and breed groups in Australia or overseas. This study aims to fill that gap and provide a baseline of this information in Australia.

Information on disorder prevalence and severity will provide an estimation of the welfare impact of each disorder at a population and breed level. This will inform prioritisation of control measures, such as genetic testing, screening at an early age or breed registry intervention to reduce conformational predispositions. The project aims to deliver an ongoing, online, companion animal disease surveillance and information system. It will monitor trends of disease prevalence and success of control programs over time.

(2) Who is carrying out the study?

The study is being conducted by veterinary researchers from the VetCompass Australia consortium led by Professor Mark Krockenberger and Associate Professor Navneet Dhand.

(3) What does the study involve?

The study requires animal health records (a clinical data extract) to be exported to the VetCompass Australia database at a designated interval. Records are the normal ones taken in a veterinary consultation. The project is designed so there is no cost and minimal inconvenience to your practice.

Specific requirements for establishing VetCompass Australia in your practice

The practice uses a Practice Management System (PMS) with a VetCompass Australia clinical data extract query and can export a report of animal health records to VetCompass Australia

Many PMSs in Australia already have a VetCompass Australia clinical data extract query. Please contact us for up-to-date information on whether your PMS complies. If the PMS is not compliant with creating and exporting a clinical data extract or with VeNom coding, VetCompass Australia will work with the PMS provider to develop the necessary software at no cost to your practice.

Optional (but desirable) - the practice uses a PMS updated with fields for VeNom codes

VeNom codes are standardised veterinary clinical codes for presenting complaints, diagnosis, breeds and procedures. They were developed by veterinarians and researchers and are managed by the Royal Veterinary College London. Using these codes increases the completeness of records and facilitates their retrieval. VetCompass Australia uses text mining software to search free-text records so your records are NOT deleted if not using VeNom codes.

The practice informs clients of their participation in VetCompass Australia by displaying VetCompass Australia literature

The VetCompass Australia poster and client information leaflets should be prominently displayed in the waiting room. The literature outlines the aims and significance of VetCompass Australia and the option to opt-out, if the client does not want their animal's data to be collected. Contact details for further information are included.

Specific requirements during the veterinary consultation

If your practice does not wish to use VeNom codes, there are no extra requirements during consultation, above standard best practice record taking.

If the client wishes to opt-out, we ask you to record this in the electronic records as 'client opt-out' or 'no client consent'. Please contact a member of the project team who will delete all past records from that client in the VetCompass Australia database and they will not be included in any studies. Future records of that client that may be included in general practice export reports will be deleted. Where past records have already been used in the analysis of data, the animal's data will remain included in the study.

If your practice wishes to use VeNom coding, there will be a few extra fields enabled to record the codes. The codes are accessed using a multi-letter search function by typing in the first letters of the word (eg 'abs' will trigger a drop-down list of multiple 'abscess' possibilities). You will be able to record multiple VeNom codes for the consultation or no codes if you wish.

(4) What data will be collected?

VetCompass Australia will collect records of each animal's visit, including patient demographics (species, breed, colour, date of birth, sex, neuter status, microchip number, insurance status, body measurements in a queryable format and owner's postcode) and clinical information (clinical notes, presenting complaint, diagnosis, treatment, cost and deceased status with relevant dates). Animals are not named but each one is given a unique number to identify it. This is necessary to collate a complete case history from separate visit events. It will enable the project to refer to the animal's records in the future, if required, to check data validity and record animals with conditions of specific interest for future research.

VetCompass Australia will not collect any client information apart from the postcode

This may be used to establish clusters of disease in a particular geographic area.

Validation of VetCompass Australia Data

A researcher may need to ask the practice with the animal identifier code for further clinical details, laboratory or referral reports on the animal in order to validate accuracy and completeness of data. Participation in VetCompass Australia does not obligate you to provide extra records. If you do provide them, we would give you an additional consent form to sign.

Future Studies

Should a need for further studies be identified through data collection from your practice, a VetCompass Australia researcher may be in contact with you to request further information. Participation in this original VetCompass Australia project does not put your practice under any obligation to participate in further studies if you do not wish. If you do wish to participate, a new consent form and ethics approval number will be provided for this further study. You will be asked to re-identify the animal from the animal identifier code and send a letter of request and consent to the client for voluntary participation in this further study involving their animal.

(5) How much time will the study take?

Participation in VetCompass Australia has been designed so that it does not impinge on the time, efficiency or efficacy of a busy practice.

Initial establishment of VetCompass Australia within a practice

- Establish the compliance of your PMS with the clinical data extract and VeNom codes – done by the VetCompass Australia team by email, phone or short practice meeting.
- Establish staff understanding of the aims and significance of the project and client opt-out option – a short practice meeting and outlining the VetCompass Australia poster, client information leaflet and brochure.
- Awareness of VeNom codes (if they are to be used) – familiarisation with common codes.
- Display VetCompass Australia poster and/or literature in the waiting area.

During the consultation

Generally, no further time will be added to the consultation, as patient information will be recorded as normal. Initially, coding using VeNom diagnosis may involve some thinking time. However, you are not required to make an entry in the VeNom field if you do not wish.

Exporting a clinical data extract

As the process is automated there will be no time burden on the practice.

Validating results

There will be a small time burden if we request access to additional results, such as laboratory reports on individual animals and your practice consents. By participating in VetCompass Australia, you are not obligated to consent to this validation process.

(6) Can I withdraw from the study?

Consenting to be in this study is completely voluntary and you are not under any obligation to do so. If you do consent, you can withdraw at any time prior to exporting data to VetCompass Australia without affecting your relationship with The University of Sydney.

If you choose to withdraw, contact a member of the project team who will cease data collection from that moment. Once data is exported to VetCompass Australia, it is an indication of practice consent for that data to be used for the purposes outlined in the Participant Information Statement.

(7) Will anyone else know the results?

All aspects of the study will be strictly confidential and only researchers in VetCompass Australia or collaborating research projects, such as VetCompass at RVC London, will have access to the raw data. The results of analyses on data you provide will be submitted for publication in scientific papers, PhD theses and VetCompass websites. Individual practices, animals or clients will not be identifiable in any of these reports.

Data collection, storage and analysis are compliant with Privacy legislation and have approval from the University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee.

(8) Will the study benefit me?

The VetCompass Australia project will benefit many aspects of veterinary practice:

- It will provide broad coverage of clinical information relevant to practising veterinarians. It will return information from the project to your practice via peer-reviewed literature and our website. Summary information will be available to the public and will help in education of prevention and control of common animal diseases.

- Extra publicity and proof of commitment to improved animal welfare by having your practice logo on the VetCompass Australia website, with a hyperlink to your practice website.
- If you choose to use VeNom standardised codes, there will be many benefits including increased ease of internal analysis of practice data and clinical audits, facilitation of insurance claims and improved record taking which encourages diagnosis-driven, rather than symptom-led therapeutic protocols.
- If you do not choose to use VeNom codes, your practice will still see the benefits of a commitment to improved record keeping.
- Increased public perception of your practice as engaging with national scientific research to improve animal welfare.
- Increased staff motivation due to engagement in a project that tackles the continuing problem of unnecessary high frequencies of certain disorders in certain breeds.

(9) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes please, we encourage you to!

(10) What if I require further information about the study or my involvement in it?

At any stage, contact the Project Manager on 02 8627 5213 or vetcompass@sydney.edu.au

Further information on VetCompass Australia can be found at: vetcompass.com.au

(11) What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact The Manager, Human Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on 02 8627 8176 (phone), 02 8627 8177 (fax) or ro.humanethics@sydney.edu.au (email).

This information sheet is for you to keep