

## **Part III: Rules for Keeping Records on Small Animals**

Continuing our discussion of the rules of the Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners regarding record keeping, this month, we turn our attention to those rules that apply specifically to small animal records.

For a complete copy of the small animal record keeping rules, please refer to 1730-01-.22 (2). Reading through this section shouldn't take you long. It actually contains only a few specific requirements.

First, the record "shall be clear, legible, retrievable,...". This is actually a major requirement and an area to which practitioners should devote some attention. As one Board attorney told me, "If it's not written down, it didn't happen." Well, as a consultant to the Board who has looked at hundreds of records, I would add a couple of other points.

1. If a veterinarian dealing with a complaint cannot provide a record, that's a complaint he/she is probably not going to win.
2. If I can't read what you wrote, I cannot follow your thought process and determine if your care for that patient met the standard of care. Make it "clear and legible."

Second, the next two parts of the rule simply lay out how the record should identify the owner and the patient. The rules require the owner's name, address, and phone number and the identifying information for the pet, like name, species, age, sex, breed, and description. Pretty standard stuff. I have seen records that just have the owner's name and the pet's name with no other identifiers. Make sure your records contain the required information.

Third, each pet shall have a separate record. The rules do allow for all the records of all patients owned by a particular owner to be kept in a group chart. It doesn't mean that each pet shouldn't have a separate record; it just means that all that owner's pets records can be kept together in one chart or folder. If you do this, just make sure, in the event you have to produce a record for an investigation, that any one particular pet's record is retrievable.

Lastly, the small animal record should contain information about the patient's "vaccinations, medical and surgical history and procedures." Now, that's kind of a broad statement. Remember that the general rules covering all records require you to record the reason the animal presents, the "veterinary interventions performed or prescribed," and the drugs and dosages prescribed, administered, or dispensed. So,

when taken together, it means your record can't be just a list of vaccinations and procedures.

I think the best way to think of your medical records is to keep them in a manner and with sufficient detail that another veterinarian could pick up the chart and see what you did, when you did it, and why, and then proceed to provide ongoing care for that patient without having to talk to you. That next veterinarian that looks at the record might be your associate, might be a relief veterinarian (that you don't want calling you while you're on the beach), or a veterinarian from the Board (that you also don't want calling you while you're on the beach or EVER for that matter).

Next month we'll wrap up our discussion of record keeping rules by taking a look at the large animal record rules.

Respectfully,

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