RVN Reader Review Guidelines

Introduction

This document provides guidance for Registered Veterinary Nurse (RVN) reviewers of clinical veterinary research (CVR) applications. It provides an outline of the points that should be considered by RVNs when acting as a member of the RCVS Ethics Review Panel). If an RVN is part of the clinical veterinary research project being reviewed it could pose a conflict of interest and the RVN reviewer should make that known to the Rapporteur and an alternative RVN would normally be appointed.

There are three aspects to RVN reviewing.

1. To comment on the CVR proposal from the animals' viewpoint, e.g. the procedures and techniques[1] to be carried out on the animals.
2. To comment on the potential roles for a veterinary nurse in a practice caring for the animals in the project.
3. To comment on the potential involvement of an owner (or person responsible) whose animal(s) are being used in the project and who will inevitable be the animal's full-time carer.

The important elements of an RVN review are to understand the objective(s) of the research, and the procedures that involve the animal and indirectly the owner. Details of the procedures to be carried out on the animal, therefore, assume key importance rather than the reasons why they are being carried out (which will be dealt with by other members of the Ethics Review Panel).

Animals

Comments on the CVR proposal from the animals' viewpoint could include the following.

1. The potential benefits that aim to be achieved by the project.
2. The possible harms (adverse effects) that may be incurred during the execution of the project.

[1] A *procedure* will comprise a series of separate *techniques* e.g. neutering will comprise giving an anaesthetic, followed by surgery, following by recovery and aftercare.

3. Whether any these harms incurred could be avoided or alleviated in some way.
4. The implementation of any scientific or humane endpoints, their recognition and their implementation.

Owner/Client/Keeper

The RVN ethics reviewer might comment on relevant aspects of the owner/keeper of an animal who is being asked to consent to research on an animal in line with the Code of Conduct for veterinary nurses (see https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-nurses/). The key documents for an the RVN reviewer to scrutinise are the Application Form, the Information Sheet (IS) and Consent Form (CF), as well as any other documents that could require or benefit from a veterinary nurse input. In particular, the Reviewer should be mindful of the clinical phrases and technical jargon that applicants may provide, and to help ensure that they are explained in simple English to the owners so that the proposed research is understood by a range of differing abilities. It is helpful if the reviewer also makes some suggestions for alternative wording.

On occasion, a veterinary nurse may be asked to obtain informed consent from the owners on behalf of the Principal Investigator (PI), to answer any of their questions, and sometimes to provide some reassurance. Questions regarding the integrity of the research may need referring to the PI. Reviewing the key documents with this in mind will ensure that any information presented to owners will be sufficiently detailed to assist their decision making so they feel able to give or refuse consent or to ask further questions.

Veterinary nurse

The RVN reviewer may recommend that the veterinary nurse should be the animal's advocate, in the presence or absence of the owner. This advocacy may include the request to withdraw an animal from the study or for the provision of some alleviate treatment e.g. additional relief, if the pain and distress is above that normally associated with the routine veterinary treatment of their condition (so called 'Rescue Therapy').

The following section summarise specific areas for an ethics review of a clinical veterinary research project with specific relevance for the RVN Reviewer. The other areas are where the veterinary (RVN) nurse might have a role to play.

Proposed aims of the study:

a. The project title should be short, clear and descriptive and include the species.
b. The aims should be written in terms that are easy to understand by a non-specialist and contain no complex technical terms.

Lay summary:

a. This should be written using appropriate lay language.
b. This should accurately summarise the justification for the study, the methods that will be used, how the data will be analysed and the benefits of the study.

Methodology, Statistics and Study Design:

a. Attention to the existence, and practicality, of any inclusion and exclusion criteria for subject animal recruitment, as well as the method of recruitment.
b. The methods to be employed to collect outcome data should be described e.g. animal monitoring.
c. If output data are be analysed, check that the measures to be taken are practical, adequate and their measurement will not jeopardise animal welfare.
d. Copies of questionnaires, interviews or on-line surveys should be scrutinised carefully for ambiguous, overly intrusive and irrelevant questions as well as technical terminology.
e. Feel satisfied that the project is well planned and that the project will be carried out in a timely manner for the animals and owners i.e. at a convenient time and not unduly time consuming.

Harm/Benefit Analysis:

Animals

a. Is it clear that the veterinary nurse has a specific responsibility to be the animal's advocate and to help the applicant and co-workers recognise when an animal is suffering in any way e.g. pain and distress (such as fear, anxiety)?
b. Is the study likely to provide the stated potential benefits for the subject animals or owners as well as to other animals and owners in the future?
c. Is it clear that issues relating to minimising the risk of harm, or if unpredicted harms arise, have been satisfactorily addressed?
d. Are there any other animal welfare or ethical issues that the applicant may have overlooked?

Humane Endpoint/Success-Failure Endpoints/Withdrawal Point/Rescue strategy:

a. Has the applicant outlined the measures they intend to use if it becomes clear that the study is not progressing as predicted? These criteria should be clearly explained and understood by the veterinary nurse and the owner.

Quality of Life assessment:

a. Where applicable, the applicant should incorporate a quality of life assessment which should be clearly understood by the veterinary nurse.
b. Is the veterinary nurse involved in any quality of life assessment?

Consent Form/Information Sheet/Owner Involvement:

a. Has a consent form and a separate information sheet been supplied ahead of the start of the project and are they intelligible for the owner e.g. free from jargon and in lay language?
b. If appropriate, have the owners been informed of the time commitment expected of them for the research?
c. Have participants been given sufficient information and time to make an informed decision about participation, e.g. could the study information be sent out before a planned elective referral consultation, rather than being presented for the first time in the consulting room during an emergency appointment?
d. If the owners wish to raise a concern or complaint, have adequate contact details been supplied?

e. Has it been made clear that the person providing consent must be 18 years of age or over?
f. Is there any undue coercion to encourage an owner to participate e.g. payment, free treatments, unnecessary ongoing treatments?

Other issues:

Humans

a. If the study involves human participants e.g., veterinary professionals or animal owners, has the applicant identified what ethical issues might arise during, or as a result of, the study and how these will be addressed?
b. Has applicant identified and completed all relevant documentation in preparation for the study, i.e., insurance, COSHH risk assessment forms?
c. Is the applicant mindful of any potential participant vulnerabilities (animal/owner) that might include disabilities, cultural sensitives, learning differences, and issues regarding a deceased pet?
d. If there is a risk that the research may cause harm or distress to human participants, has a suggestion for an accessible support service been made (Samaritans, Vetlife UK etc)?