Clinical Governance Framework

Cultivating a culture of continuous improvement

Foreword

Do you know what clinical governance is? Although clinical governance is a term that most veterinary professionals are aware of it is fair to say that we don't all agree on what it is. A clinical governance framework is so much more than a set of guidelines; it is inspiring, empowering and inclusive; creating an environment in which high standards of care can thrive, and be sustainable!

We have reflected on the similarities and differences between veterinary and human healthcare; developing our own framework that we believe supports animal healthcare the best. To enable us to create this inspirational environment we identified three goals:

1. Design a clinical governance framework - we have defined the six pillars that integrate to encompass all of our clinical priorities

2. Define what we mean by the term "quality of care" – care is complex, multifactorial and must be individualised to every situation. Our patient centred care model accounts for this

3. Set out the necessary components that support a culture of clinical improvement – we have identified five elements we aspire to

No single goal can be successful without the others. A clinical governance framework helps us to understand our current working practices and identify change where needed. Defining "quality of care" is essential for us to understand what we are trying to achieve with that change. To cultivate the right environment we must also commit to behaviours that engage inclusively, challenge fairly and encourage sustainable accountability.

A clinical governance framework by its very nature is under continuous improvement itself to ensure it is equally rewarding for staff, owners and animals alike! I hope this is enough to whet your appetite to read on!

Paul Higgs

Chief Veterinary Officer

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Quality of Care – our definition

CVS's guiding purpose is to provide the best possible care to animals, underpinned by a key aim to recommend and provide the best clinical care every time. This is a commitment we take extremely seriously, yet best care is a term that will mean different things to different people. Quality of care is complex, multifactorial and must be individualised to every situation; any definition of animal healthcare quality must take many aspects into account, no longer can we consider the "text-book" approach to be the right one if it does not account for the full context of our patients.

We believe that six components of animal healthcare can be identified, and that high quality care should be:

Welfare centred
Recognising our professional oath that the health and welfare of animals committed to our care is our principal duty. Understanding that patient-safety is critical to protecting an animal's welfare by identifying, preventing and mitigating risks, errors and harm that can occur during the provision of care. Acknowledging the importance of care-giver welfare and satisfaction in the standards of care provided.

Contextualised
Using a patient and owner centred approach, respecting the importance of an animal owner's perspective.
Prioritising individualised care plans that account for the complex interaction of all costs.
Recognising that cost includes but is not limited to social, cultural, accessible, emotional, environmental, ethical and financial aspects.

Effective
Providing veterinary care using an evidence-based medicine approach.
Supporting veterinary staff to access current evidence and guidelines.
Ensuring that veterinary services are effective in treating animals whilst avoiding overuse, underuse or misuse of treatments.

Quality of care

Equitable
Ensuring that quality of the veterinary care available and offered is consistent irrespective of geographic location, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status of owners and staff. Accounting for the contextualised care approach in which veterinary care is available but may not be accessible in the context of an individual patient.

Timely
Identifying that veterinary care should be provided in a prioritised way that ensures animals can receive essential care (diagnosis, treatment or preventative care) without harmful delay. Accounting for the consideration on care providers in overcoming the barriers that delay or prevent treatment.

Efficient
Reducing waste associated with inefficient provision of healthcare.
Optimising efficient use of all resources available in the provision of veterinary care without impacting on patient safety.
Acknowlegding that resources include but are not limited to time, equipment, facilities, wellbeing, funds, support structures.

Developing a culture that supports clinical improvement

As already noted, clinical governance will only achieve its goals if we create the right environment in which continuous clinical improvement is positively enabled and valued. To achieve success we must commit to a clinical improvement culture that is inclusive of the input from all team members; where people are safe to identify and discuss concerns; where ideas and learnings are shared so that change can be effective in practices across our group, and in the profession as a whole. Achieving this environment will be a continuous improvement process in itself; this is aspirational and our teams may need support to undertake these behaviours. We are committed to helping them get there and to represent this improvement culture at all levels in the business.

We aspire to an environment that promotes:

- **Just culture** – Fairness, openness and learning by helping people feel confident to speak up when things go wrong, rather than fearing blame.

- **Accountability** - High levels of ownership of the quality of clinical activities by setting clear expectations, ensuring open lines of communication and ensuring honest leadership.

- **Inclusive leadership** – Values team members, invites diverse perspectives, welcomes challenge and creates an environment where people recognise that their individual opinions and contributions improve the clinical outcome and wellbeing of patients, owners and staff.

- **Teamwork** – Collaboration, cooperation and trust are at the heart of thinking, planning and decision making.

- **Systems thinking** – The problem solving approach that recognises that processes are often a web of complex and connected systems. It explores the way that these constituent parts function and influence each other over time and within the context of larger systems.

The Six Pillars contributing to 'quality of care'

If developing a culture that supports clinical improvement is the 'how' then our six pillars are the 'what' of clinical governance.

They are the framework through which CVS continuously improves the quality of our clinical services by creating an environment in which high standards of veterinary care will thrive.

Our six pillars are the building blocks to achieve clinical improvement and they complete our clinical governance framework. They are:

- Clinical Effectiveness
- Research and Development
- Ethical Integrity and Sustainability
- Information Sharing and Collaboration
- Education and Training
- Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

Our vision is to adapt, support and continually improve a world-leading veterinary governance framework that will cultivate the best professional culture and empower us all to advance the standards of veterinary care.

To support this work a newly-formed Integrated Care Council with representation from each of the pillars will oversee the Clinical Governance strategy and ensure that each pillar receives the support it needs.

In this section, we examine what each pillar really means including our aim for that pillar and the priorities that support our work.

Clinical Effectiveness

Aim

To ensure delivery of outstanding clinical care by our frontline teams across all practice divisions, our laboratories and other services. Our company's purpose is to give the best possible care to animals, and this requires consistent effort.

Priorities

To drive focussed, collaborative and inclusive approaches to clinical improvement we aim to:

- Establish a robust, pragmatic and achievable standard of care quality that can be strived towards in every patient and client interaction.

- Ensure inclusive, collaborative and transparent clinical decision-making with broad and invested representation across all clinical teams.

- Develop an environment where our clinical teams feel safe to perform at their very best and to learn from their own and others experiences.

- Address important issues affecting our clinical colleagues including the assessment of new clinical products, development of clinical guidelines, and supporting an evidence-based approach to care delivery.

Research and Development

Aim

To foster and sustain a research-positive culture within CVS that drives change through the generation of new knowledge. This means colleagues feel supported and empowered to participate in clinical research within their role and that we capture, consolidate and disseminate key outputs.

Priorities

- Welfare Centred Research – The research question is clinically important to animals, their owners, the profession or has 'one health' benefits and further evidence is required to answer the research question through a robust study.

- Open and accessible research - Research should be conducted with integrity and transparency. Findings should be disseminated and outputs reported.

- Ethical Research - Research should aim to maximise benefit and minimise risk and harm to those involved. Owners should be appropriately informed; lines of responsibility and accountability should be clearly defined.

Ethical Integrity and Sustainability

This pillar has two components:

- Veterinary ethics
- Sustainability
    - One Health
    - Equity Diversity and Inclusion

Veterinary Ethics

Aim

To inspire the highest level of public trust in CVS' veterinary service provision through the integrity of our conduct and by prioritising the requirements of being welfare-centred and providing contextualised care.

Priorities

To ensure we meet and sustain a moral integrity that our staff can be proud of we will:

- Understand and adapt to the changing societal needs on the veterinary sector while always prioritising animal welfare, advocacy and professional integrity.

- Empower teams with the tools and frameworks to confidently make decisions in patient and client care that continue to promote the confidence and trust of the public.

- Positively influence policies and legislation to uphold the standing and integrity of the veterinary profession.

- Exceed all standards in patient protection, regulatory compliance, honesty and governance in social and clinical research.

Sustainability

Our sustainability programme has six important workstreams with two making important contributions to our clinical improvement.

Equity Diversity and Inclusion

Aim

To develop and sustain a just culture throughout our business; where inclusion, equity and diversity of thought and opinion are considered essential elements of creating this.

Priorities

To ensure that the importance of inclusion, equity and diversity of thought is understood and valued by our teams we will:

- Ensure appropriate consideration and acceptance of diverse opinions.

- Provide our teams with the tools they need to deliver inclusive, contextualised clinical care within the definition of quality animal care.

- Extend our approach to inclusivity and equity for our clients with the aim of providing the right care for the individual patient in the context of their, and their owner's, needs.

One Health

Aim

To protect the environment and public health while balancing our primary responsibility for animal welfare.

Priorities

To ensure that we consider the One Health implications of providing quality animal care we will:

- Balance the requirements of individual animal welfare with appropriate care for the environment, other animals and the health of people.

- Provide support that enables local change to engage with One Health initiatives so that they can be driven and achieved by all of our practice teams.

- Use a data driven approach where we seek to understand the problem and then respond to it - Where we can measure, that's exactly what we do.

Information Sharing and Collaboration

Aim

To ensure that we are effective in the way we share best practice; communicating improvements and changes that are useful or necessary for our clinical professionals and provide the channels for our teams to collaborate.

Priorities

To meet our responsibilities when communicating with and between our colleagues we wish to be:

- Informing – providing a feedback loop or raising awareness. This could be at a local level or across the group, for example when we break new ground with relevant and practical Research and Development.

- Educating – we will share learning, education and development and best practice. This includes sharing evidence and data around the company that will foster a culture of continuous improvement – supporting our teams to improve the care they provide.

- Collaborating – we will ensure we have the channels that enable a diverse group of colleagues to collaborate with each other, no matter where they are.

- Celebrating – we will share our results, celebrate progress and recognise success in learning. We will also highlight where we have met or exceeded our own or third party standards or scrutiny.

Education and Training

Aim

To nurture experienced, diverse, and creative members of our clinical teams to deliver high quality animal care. Delivering evidence-based and accessible education to our colleagues involved in animal care to match their needs, no matter their setting, context or job role.

Priorities

To meet the training and education needs of our teams we need to:

- Understand and regularly review the educational and training needs of stakeholders involved in animal care.

- Develop and deliver an education provision that accounts for the needs of the patient, client, staff and business.

- Identify all important stakeholders for education and training needs and use the best route to deliver accessible and relevant education to improve the quality of our care.

- Sustain a transparent educational governance structure that facilitates collaboration with the clinical teams.

Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

Aim

To achieve consistent and effective methods of quality improvement to support the continual evolution and evaluation of the highest standards of patient care at the point of delivery.

Priorities

To support a standardised approach to improvement across our practices that involves:

- Using feedback to guide the repeated quality improvement process. Through integrating our experience with data collection and analysis, we understand our progress and enable demonstrable improvement.

- Empowering people to make change. By giving people closest to the issues affecting quality of care the resources they need to work together to improve processes and overcome obstacles that impede great veterinary care.

- Learning from everything. Striving to ensure that as many things as possible go right by continuously learning and making improvements by analysing things that go right as well as mistakes or near misses.

- Meeting or exceeding standards. By fully engaging with the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme and valuing feedback from assessors we can continue to provide the highest standard of veterinary care and prioritise improvements in our practices.

Governance

A clinical governance framework can be used effectively at all levels. At the local or practice level our teams can establish governance structures to suit their needs (such as Clinical Learning Reviews; previously known as "morbidity and mortality rounds"). At the company, national or divisional level we want to ensure that there is identifiable accountability structures that will enable us to deliver on our aims and priorities that support our clinical improvement. These are the core governance structures along with their roles, responsibilities the pillars of governance that they influence. Our governance structure ensures we have a solid foundation on which to deliver our pillar priorities and you can read more about our committees in the appendix.

Appendix

Integrated Care Council

- Is responsible for the review and oversight of the clinical governance framework at CVS.

- Provides a collaboration network to share high-level learning across the different clinical areas of the business.

- Includes representation from key opinion leaders with expertise to oversee the strategy for each pillar of governance.

We recognise that each area of the business will undertake clinical governance processes themselves; however, there is a need for an integrated group of key opinion leaders to ensure that the clinical governance framework continues to be fit for purpose. A secondary role will be to consider significant, pan-divisional clinical governance challenges.

Integrated Care Council

*Chair: Chief Veterinary Officer

Clinical Effectiveness

*Chief Veterinary Nursing Officer
*Equine clinical lead
*Farm Animal clinical lead
*Laboratory Division clinical lead
*Small Animal Veterinary Directors

Research and Development

*Director of Clinical Research

Ethical Integrity and Sustainability

*EDI Committee representative (EDI)
*Elected member from practice division
*Director of Innovation (One Health)

Information Sharing and Collaboration

*Director of Communications

Education and Training

*Head of Clinical Education

Quality Improvement and Patient Safety

*Director of Quality Improvement

Clinical Advisory Committees

The main clinical challenges facing our teams will vary depending on ways of working, species under their care and the responsibilities they carry. It is clear that there is a need for inclusion and representation of many stakeholders in wider clinical strategy decisions; each clinical division will be represented by a clinical advisory committee to help ensure delivery of continuous clinical improvement. All committees will also have access to expertise to support clinical research, quality improvement, procurement, communications, PR and ethics. They are:

- Clinical support advisory committee.

- Equine clinical advisory committee.

- Farm animal clinical advisory committee.
    - Discipline specific sub-committees e.g. poultry, dairy health, small ruminants.

- Laboratory clinical advisory committee.

- Nurse advisory commitee.

- Small animal clinical advisory committee.
    - Clinical discipline specific working groups to discuss and advise on topics that require expertise. Working groups will receive representation from specialist, advanced practitioner, primary care, newly qualified vets as well as RVNs.

Learning, Education and Development Group

Oversight of the clinical education programme for all major areas of CVS

- Address needs identified in Clinical Advisory Committees by advising on or providing necessary educational resources.

- Develop and evolve learning solutions that can ensure that our education and training provision meets the priorities of the clinical governance framework.

- Ensure that there is consistency in education delivery and standards through the provision of guidelines and review of resources Should also consider the additional training needs to enable CVS to meet the aspirational elements of a continuous improvement culture with a particular focus on leadership.

The LED group will be responsible for governance of the training and education priorities and delivery. It will be essential that the LED group is integrated and collaborates with the other stakeholder groups in the business to ensure our learning priorities are met.

Collaboration working group

- Respond to communications briefs on new developments.

- Evaluate level of importance and develop communications plan to reach different audiences.

- Execute plan through the company's communications channels.

- Develop routes for people across the business to collaborate.

Clinical Research Ethics Committee

- All clinical research undertaken at CVS must be reviewed and approved by a committee of independent colleagues.

- The Clinical Research Ethics Committee ensures that ensures that all research complies with ethical and legislative needs.

- Study design is scrutinised to ensure that the aims and objectives of the project can be met.

- The Clinical Research Ethics Committee is comprised of research, clinical and client care expertise from across our practices.

Sustainability Programme

- One Health Workstream within our sustainability programme balance environmental impact of our treatment with human health and animal welfare.

- Equity Diversity and Inclusion workstream is responsible for how the company nurtures an inclusive culture over time.

Clinical Research Grants Review Panel

The Clinical Research Grants Review Panel is responsible for assessing annual applications for funds to support clinical research.

- Comprised of 10 clinical staff from across the clinical divisions and an additional two external appointments to provide ratification.

- The CRG Review Panel is responsible for ensuring that the CVS research budget is allocated fairly and transparently with priority given to projects that align with identified clinical research priorities.

- All research supported will be clinically relevant and have ethical approval.

- Research requiring a Home Office license is not supported by CVS research funds.

About CVS Group

CVS Group is one of the leading integrated veterinary service providers in the UK, Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

The Group employs over 8,200 colleagues working in small animal, equine, farm and mixed practices across its three territories.

The business is focused on providing a high quality, people-led service to its customers, with outstanding and dedicated clinical and support services teams at the core of its strategy.

The Group operates an integrated model with over 500 practice sites across its three markets, including nine specialist referral centres and 34 dedicated out-of-hours sites.

The Group's diagnostic laboratories, pet crematoria and Animed Direct online pharmacy and retail business provide their services to CVS practices and third parties.