



VetCompass - UK Small Animal Health Surveillance

Information sheet for veterinary practices

What is VetCompass?

VetCompass is an exciting opportunity for primary-care practitioners to become part of evidence based veterinary medicine and to improve animal welfare. Led by the Royal Veterinary College (RVC), **VetCompass** explores and identifies health questions relating to dogs, cats, rabbits and exotics under veterinary care in the UK. Veterinary practitioners are constrained by the very limited amounts and relevance of the published information on the prevalence and risk factors for the diseases that they treat each day. **VetCompass** effectively fills these data gaps with much needed and valuable information that is highly relevant to typical first opinion caseloads.

How does VetCompass work?

General practitioners examine, diagnose and treat huge numbers of animal patients every day. This information is stored as clinical records in individual computerised practice management systems. **VetCompass** has developed systems for the secure transfer of selected anonymised fields from these patient records from veterinary practices to a central database at the RVC. **VetCompass** researchers analyse these anonymised data for a wide range of epidemiological research projects and has already collected data from over 500 small animal practices covering over six million animals (Oct 2016).

The VetCompass vision

VetCompass is an efficient and sustainable surveillance system with enormous potential for practice-based study of small animal health.



VetCompass can examine the full array of:

- Infectious and non-infectious disorders
- Acute and chronic conditions
- Common and rare diseases
- Treatments and outcomes

In order to generate reliable results of direct relevance for vets working in practice.

VetCompass studies are designed to fill knowledge gaps in veterinary medicine and produce practical healthcare information that can:

- Underpin and direct evidence-based veterinary medicine
- Assist the training of veterinary students and professionals
- Identify welfare and research priorities that contribute to long-term improvements in health and welfare.

What does it mean for participating practices?

On a day-to-day basis, there is no change to practice workflow and patterns. Practicing vets already record high quality clinical records and **VetCompass** does not request that any extra information are recorded. **VetCompass** simply uses the information that practices already record and applies cutting edge data-mining techniques to analyse these huge volumes of data.



Some veterinary computer systems already offer the option to record standardised 'VeNom' diagnosis terms during episodes of clinical care. Tagging such terms to clinical records facilitates finding cases of specific disorders but is not a requirement of participation. Record tagging also makes it easier for practices to analyse their own caseloads, e.g. for clinical audit and benchmarking purposes.

Participating practices are given access to their own clinical data via an online database that is specifically designed for research purposes. These data can then be used by practices for internal audit or for studies that lead to publications.

Practices promote their participation in **VetCompass** to their clients. Promotional posters and leaflets are provided for waiting room displays. Promotion can also be via practice websites and social media.

What does it mean for practice clients?

The RCVS has agreed that **VetCompass** operates under an 'opt-out' client consent process for data-sharing because only anonymised data are shared. This means that the default is that all animals are included and no further action is necessary unless clients do *not* want to share their pet's records. In that case, the practice simply records 'opt out' in the clinical notes or selects the 'opt out' VeNom code.

What information is collected?

VetCompass only collects anonymised clinical and demographic data. The data fields collected include the summary diagnosis term (VeNom code), free-text clinical notes and treatment details, along with date of birth, sex, breed, microchip number, insurance status and partial postcode. Animal names, client details and financial information are *not* shared.



How secure is the VetCompass database?

VetCompass employs stringent protocols for the secure transfer and storage of data and fully complies with the Data Protection Act. The database holds anonymised information only that is encrypted and password-protected.

What does the VetCompass team use the data for?

VetCompass data contribute to a diverse range of MSc, PhD and other research projects that aim to reveal novel insights into the health of small animals. These results contribute to the evidence base that vets now use every day to improve the health and welfare of their patients. To date (Oct 2016), **VetCompass** has published 21 peer-reviewed papers, with many more in progress. More details of current and previous projects can be found at: www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass

Are project results truly anonymous?

Yes. **VetCompass** does *not* collect any sensitive animal or owner information therefore individual animals or owners are *not* identifiable in project results. Disease mapping is conducted to postal sector level (using partial postcode) only, preventing the identification of specific premises or individuals.

How is the programme funded?

The **VetCompass** programme is truly collaborative and is supported by a diverse range of external funders as well as being part of the Royal Veterinary College. Some of these funding bodies include:



How long will VetCompass run for?

The **VetCompass** programme is a long-term initiative that will run indefinitely. Long-term monitoring of disease occurrence is necessary to identify trends and evaluate the success of control strategies.

Has VetCompass received ethical approval?

VetCompass has received full ethical approval from the RVC Clinical Research and Ethical Review Board. In addition, the programme has been reviewed and is supported by the RCVS.



How does VetCompass benefit my practice?

- **VetCompass** is a valuable source of healthcare information that supports evidence-based practice. Results from all published **VetCompass** studies are available on the **VetCompass** website, along with an owner-friendly 'Learn zone'.
- Practices can access their own practice's 'data silo' in the **VetCompass** database where you can evaluate your records in an easy-to-search format.
- Compliance with RCVS Practice Standards Scheme which stipulates data sharing with a national research project such as **VetCompass**.
- Enhanced public perception that your practice is engaging with national scientific research to improve animal welfare.
- Greater staff satisfaction by contributing to both the care and welfare of patients at an individual level but also at a population level.

For further details:

More information on **VetCompass** can be found at www.rvc.ac.uk/vetcompass

Or for specific enquiries, please contact the **VetCompass** team

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