

ASAB Accreditation Committee statement
Remote working and veterinary referral during Coronavirus
(Covid-19) national health emergency



These are unprecedented times and as clinical animal behaviourists we all need to review the way we are working to minimise transmission of this virus. However, it is important that any changes we make continue to comply with all legislation, protect animal welfare, and protect both human and animal health and safety. For this reason, we are aligning our advice to practitioners with that being provided by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) to vets, both in general practice and working in referral centres.

ASAB Accreditation supports the use of remote video consultations, until such time as we can safely resume meeting with clients and their pets face to face. Any remote video consultation can also be supported with video recordings of behaviour, where the client is able to safely obtain these. However, clinicians should be mindful of the limitations of operating through remote video consulting. We learn a great deal about our clients and their pet's behaviour through natural observation and this may be lost when working remotely. We are also unable to offer as much tailored practical support as we normally would. It is therefore important to, as always, modify the advice given according to the information available and needs of the individual case. In some cases, this will mean this is limited to first aid advice until we are able to conduct a face to face consultation.

The requirement for veterinary referral is essential to safeguard animal welfare. The link between problem behaviour and pain or illness is well established and has recently been highlighted in an excellent publication, which we would encourage you all to read (Mills et al 2020). The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1996 states that only a veterinary surgeon can carry out an act of veterinary surgery, which includes "the diagnosis of diseases in, and injuries to, animals". As such, only the animal's vet can consider and eliminate or address possible medical causes for unwanted behaviour. Failure to obtain a veterinary referral prevents the vet from doing this, which not only may result in the problem not being resolved, but may leave the animal without required treatment for that condition, contravening the Animal Welfare Act 2006. In some situations this may result in a medical emergency which could place the animal's life in danger. Vets are also having to modify the way they are working to minimise disease transmission, under RCVS and BVA guidance. However, they are still providing a service to their clients, including remote consultations where a face to face consultation cannot be justified. As such, they are still able to provide an informed referral using modern technology. There is therefore no reason to change the veterinary referral requirement in our code of conduct at this time, and we consider it would be unethical to do so.

References

Mills et al 2020 Pain and Problem Behavior in Cats and Dogs Animals 10:318 Available at <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/10/2/318/htm>

