



## Tips and advice for referring veterinarians and veterinary clinics

### WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre

#### Introduction

The WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre's (VMC) goal is to work with our referring veterinarians and help ensure a smooth transition of care — contributing to excellence in care provision and a seamless client experience.

A referral letter provides a relevant synopsis of the care that you have provided to your patients and clients. Your information allows the VMC's clinical team to review the following:

- diagnostic tests that you have performed and your relevant findings
- previous treatments and their outcome
- current working diagnosis/differentials and treatments

By understanding the primary veterinary team's thought processes and the client's awareness level, VMC representatives can smoothly join the patient's medical team and continue client communication.

The VMC's goal is to prevent avoidable errors resulting from gaps in information sharing. Sharing of quality information that's timely and relevant helps to:

- ensure expectations are set for clients
- minimize the chance of medical errors
- create an environment of excellence in client services

#### The VMC referral process

The WCVM Veterinary Medical Centre has a process to ensure consistency in patient referrals.

- Veterinarians submit all referrals online. [Click here to access the hospital's online portal.](#)
- Once the VMC receives a referral, a VMC client liaison will contact the client to schedule an appointment. The VMC books appointments based on the case's urgency and the service's availability.

- A VMC client liaison or clerical staff member will contact the client to book a consult.

#### Setting client expectations

When you submit a referral to the VMC, please ensure that the following information is communicated with your client.\*

- The purpose for the consultation or referral.
- A brief overview of the anticipated referral experience.
- An approximate estimate of initial or anticipated costs of the referral. For the emergency service, the VMC asks that estimated costs for additional diagnostics (if expected) are included along with the VMC's emergency fee.
- If the patient will be hospitalized, please inform your client about the VMC's policies regarding phone calls and hospital visits.
- Since the VMC is a veterinary teaching hospital, clients should expect the following:
  - veterinary students, clinical interns and residents may be involved with their animal's care
  - appointments may take longer than those with their regular veterinarian
  - as a specialty and emergency care centre, the VMC must triage bookings and prioritize cases based on urgency

\*Adapted from the SVMA Veterinary Case Referral Standards and Operational Policies)

To avoid miscommunication, please refrain from providing your client with a specific list of procedures that will be undertaken at the VMC except in cases when the referral is being made for a specific diagnostic procedure (as agreed upon by the referring veterinarian and the VMC clinical team).

The VMC cannot guarantee same-day diagnostics, particularly after hours. In particular, the MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) unit is unavailable after hours. As well, the VMC must limit the availability of computed tomography (CT) scans and ultrasound examinations outside of business hours.



## Tips and advice (continued)

### Setting client expectations: emergency referrals

Once you submit an emergency referral through the VMC's online referral portal, please call the VMC in advance to discuss reasonable expectations for clients and patients. Please ensure that clients are aware that some diagnostic services have limited availability after regular hours.

### Submitting an effective referral

Including accurate and relevant information is crucial to a seamless referral process. Please ensure that you include the following information.

- Important basic details such as the patient's species, breed, age and sex.
- Owner contact information.
- Relevant medical history and presenting clinical signs (ideally in a timeline fashion).
- Diagnostic tests performed with results (or anticipated timeline for results).
- Outline of medical treatment to date, with times and dosages of most recent drug administrations.
- Summary of relevant discussions with the owners or caregivers, such as what potential differentials have been discussed.

- Assessment of medical condition at time of referral or at the last examination.
- Personal contact information with clear expectations for follow-up communication.
- Transfer of responsibility for the case once the referral has taken place. At that point, the health care decision process becomes the responsibility of the receiving veterinarian.

### In addition, the referring veterinarian should do the following:

- avoid performing diagnostic tests for which the results are not likely to be available at the time of the referral so diagnostic tests are not duplicated — adding to the client's expense.
- avoid dispensing medications for the client to take to the VMC, other than current dietary supplements or medications. Please provide the receiving veterinarian with a clear list of any other medications that will be sent with the client.