

RCVS response to Coroner's Regulation 28 report in respect of Edward John Youde Barnard

Introduction

1. Firstly, having read about the tragic circumstances of his death, we wish to express our deep condolences to Mr Barnard's family and friends at what must be a very difficult time.
2. Prior to receiving the Regulation 28 report ('the report'), we were unaware of Mr Barnard's death or his use of pentobarbital. As you know, the RCVS was not called to give evidence at the inquiry nor were we invited to attend. Furthermore, we have not had access to a transcript or recording of the proceedings. As such, our below response is based solely on the report.
3. We wish to thank the Assistant Coroner for highlighting the issues in this case relevant to the veterinary profession and for the opportunity to provide the following comments and information.

Background

4. Before moving on to the specific issues raised regarding veterinary medicines, it may be of assistance to set out some background. Whilst research suggests that suicidal ideation is not higher in the veterinary profession as compared to the general population, the likelihood of completion is higher due to knowledge of, and access to, lethal means. Prevention and reduction of suicide in the veterinary professions has therefore been an area of focus in many aspects of our work in recent years, and naturally increased safeguards around veterinary medicines used for euthanasia have been a key part of this work. As such, whilst Mr Barnard was not a veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse himself, we believe our ongoing work is relevant to the issues raised in this inquiry.

Veterinary medicines

5. It should be noted that many of the requirements around controlled drugs (CDs), regardless of whether they are licensed for human or veterinary use, are set out in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, the Misuse of Drugs Regulations 2001 and the Misuse of Drugs (Safe Custody) Regulations 1973. As you will know, the Home Office is the relevant government department with responsibility for this legislation.
6. From the information we have, it is unclear how Mr Barnard obtained the [REDACTED] used to end his life and so we are unable to comment on the specifics of this case. However, the following information outlines some of the relevant guidance in respect of veterinary medicines, and specifically in relation to CDs.
7. In light of the known risk factors, the RCVS consistently goes beyond what is required by legislation with the aim of reducing misuse of drugs, including CDs. For example, although quinalbarbitone (aka Somulose) is a schedule 2 controlled drug (CD), it is exempted from 'safe custody' (specific requirements for safe storage of certain CDs) in the legislation despite the risk it poses to human life if misused. In February 2023, we therefore issued guidance requiring that veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses lock quinalbarbitone away in a manner equivalent to 'safe custody'. Similarly, the barbiturates (including [REDACTED]) are schedule 3 CDs and as such, not subject to safe custody under the relevant legislation. Again, in 2021 we issued guidance requiring veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses to securely lock them away.

8. In addition, we advise that, wherever possible, CDs should be returned to the CD cabinet at the practice for storage overnight. (See [Practice Standards Scheme standards](#), 10.1.12 (small animal), 8.1.12 (farm animal), 9.1.12 (equine)). As well as restricting access by veterinary surgeons when they are not on duty, this guidance aims to reduce the risk of drugs being stolen from vehicles and entering the illegal market.
9. As you may be aware, sale and supply of veterinary medicines is tightly controlled under the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 (as amended) (VMR), and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) gives guidance on how those regulations should be applied. The following non-exhaustive list is demonstrative of the restrictions in place:
 - a. Only a holder of a manufacturing authorisation or a wholesale dealer’s authorisation granted by the Secretary of State may supply veterinary medicinal products wholesale, or be in possession of it for that purpose.
 - b. Wholesalers may only deliver veterinary medicinal products to registered premises.
 - c. Prescription-only veterinary medicines (POM-Vs) – which includes CDs of all schedules - may only be supplied by a veterinary practice (or a pharmacist) in accordance with a prescription from a veterinary surgeon (although the VMR does allow *practices* to supply other *practices* with medicines ‘for the purpose of alleviating a temporary supply shortage that could be detrimental to animal welfare’).
10. In addition to the requirements set out by the RCVS and VMD, the veterinary profession itself is also working to reduce use of veterinary medicines in suicide. Innovations such as Euthasafe, a storage box requiring two-factor authentication and additional information to be provided before allowing access to the lethal medicines inside, is one such example.

Proposed actions and timetable

11. As required by the report, we have reviewed the existing measures in place to prevent future deaths and assessed what more could be done. We also note the Assistant Coroner’s comment as follows:

‘I am also reporting this fatal incident to the Royal Society of Veterinary Surgeons [sic] to share the information with its members and to ensure that those to whom the drug is licensed are made fully aware of its potential to be used in the completion of suicide by humans. I also make the report to the Royal Society [sic] to take any available preventive measures to reduce the risk of this suicide method in future.’

12. In light of the above, the actions set out in the table below have been agreed.

	Action	Date
1	Relevant RCVS committees to consider additional Core requirement(s) in the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme for practices to have individualised suicide prevention plans. The aim being to prevent incidents and protect staff and the wider public.	February 2025
2	RCVS Standards Committee to review the legislative requirements for schedule 2 CDs and decide what (if any) provisions may be extended to schedule 3 CDs via RCVS guidance, for example, requirement to record use in the CD register.	February 2025

	Action	Date
3	RCVS Standards Committee to review the guidance on returning CDs to the practice when off duty.	February 2025
4	Explore methods of communicating the legal and regulatory requirements relating to lethal medicines to the profession (e.g. via RCVS Academy, the RCVS online continuing professional development portal), including signposting to advisory/support services.	Spring 2025
5	Continue to engage with the Home Office in respect of implementing additional safeguards for controlled drugs used for euthanasia in veterinary medicine.	Ongoing