Microchip scanning (dogs) and microchip databases

On 6 April 2016 it became law for all dogs in the UK to have a microchip[1][2][3]- legislation BVA actively campaigned for.

Responsibilities

- It is the keeper's responsibility to ensure their dog is microchipped and registered on one of the authorised commercial databases.

- It is also the keeper's responsibility to keep their contact details up-to-date on the databases.

- Where a dog is transferred to a new keeper, the new keeper must, unless the previous keeper has already done so, record their details and any change in the dog's name with the database on which the dog's details are recorded. Transfer of ownership will require relevant documentation to be completed and, in some cases, the presentation of a transfer code depending on the requirements of the database.

- Veterinary surgeons are obliged to scan a dog for a microchip before rabies vaccination and the issue of a pet passport, or before completing other official documentation that requires identification of the animal (eg official health screening tests).

- Veterinary surgeons should report an adverse reaction to microchipping, or the migration or failure of a microchip to the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) via their online form[4].

Impact of the introduction of compulsory microchipping

Defra figures published one year on from the introduction of compulsory microchipping indicated that 8 million dogs were microchipped, 3 million more than in 2013 when the plans had first been announced. At the time it was estimated that this equated to 95% of the UK dog population[5].

The role of vets

On admission to membership of the RCVS, and in exchange for the right to practise veterinary surgery in the UK, every veterinary surgeon makes a declaration:

" I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary

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[1] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/108/contents/made
[2] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2016/58/contents/made
[3] http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2015/1990/contents/made
[4] https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/supporting-guidance/29-microchips-microchipping-and-animals-without-microchips/
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chip-your-dog-and-check-your-chip

Surgeons, and that, ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care."[6]

With the declaration in mind, vets play a key role in helping to reunite lost, and sometimes stolen, animals with their owner.

Our Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey showed that in 2017 vets were seeing on average 4.1 strays each month, with 97% of practices attempting to reunite lost pets with their owners. Compared with reunification data gathered two years previously, one year before the introduction of compulsory microchipping, vets were seeing improved rates of reunification (68% managing it more than half the time, compared to 51% in 2015).

Where reunification attempts failed, most vets said it was either because there was no identifying microchip or collar/tag (50%) or the information held on the microchip database had not been kept up to date (44%).

However, the circumstances surrounding the individual cases which present themselves in veterinary practices are sometimes not clear cut and there will be a need for the vet to exercise their professional judgement, based on the information available to them. Vets must also operate within their powers, so cannot seize or hold a dog suspected as stolen, nor can they share confidential ownership information as this would breach data protection laws and, in some circumstances, could put the animal, its owner, or its finder, at risk.

There has been some criticism of the profession from campaigners for compulsory scanning. Unfortunately, such campaigns misunderstand the powers of vets and the potential welfare harms of compulsory scanning to both animals and humans (eg those fleeing with their pets from domestic abuse).

Where there is an ownership dispute or an animal is suspected stolen vets should follow the RCVS 'Client confidentiality and microchipped animals flowchart'

Note: If a member of the public finds a stray dog and cannot contact the owner, they should report it to their local council.

Scanning for microchips

We recommend that veterinary practices should scan for a microchip under the following circumstances:

- **Prior to microchip implantation** – this helps to ensure that there is no other microchip present.

- **On presentation of a lost, stray or apparently unowned animal** – this facilitates reunification with the owner when checked against the national databases, providing the owner has kept their details up-to-date.

- **On first presentation at the practice** – this ensures that the animal is correctly identified when checked against the national databases and serves as a useful reminder to the new client to ensure that they keep their details up-to-date. The microchip details should be recorded on the practice database – often lost pets are local to the practice and a check against the practice's own database can provide a quick solution.

- **Before travelling abroad** – this is to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly and would not normally include a check against the national database(s).

- **Before rabies vaccination or official certification** – vets are obliged to scan for a microchip before administering a rabies vaccination and issuing a pet passport, or before completing other official documentation that requires identification of the animal (eg official health screening tests)

- **Annually as routine** (eg at the time of the annual check-up and/or booster vaccination) – this is also to ensure that the microchip is still working and has not migrated significantly. Although it would not

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[6] https://www.rcvs.org.uk/setting-standards/advice-and-guidance/code-of-professional-conduct-for-veterinary-surgeons/

normally include a check against the national databases it should include a check against practice records and provides an opportunity to remind the owner to keep their details up-to-date.

- **On admission for treatment or hospitalisation where appropriate** – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s).

- **Prior to euthanasia if considered appropriate** – this is part of good clinical practice to ensure that the patient is matched to clinical records. This would not normally include a check against the national database(s) and in many cases may not be appropriate.

- **On presentation of wildlife** – this is to identify any wild animals part of a local or national, wildlife rehabilitation or research programme.

NOTE: practices and owners should be aware that occasionally, as a result of chip or scanner failure or incompatibility, efforts to scan may not be successful.

National databases

There is currently a total of 14 national databases with which pet owners can choose to register their animals. These databases do not currently share their data with each other, nor is there a central database. This is a growing issue, which threatens one of the key aims of compulsory microchipping – to help reunite lost dogs with their owners. Although Check-a-Chip helps to identify which database holds the registration for a particular microchip number, it is not a central database.

For veterinary practice, cross-checking with such a large number of databases is an administrative burden which challenges already stretched vets and vet nurses, whose limited contact time with their clients and patients is better spent providing preventative healthcare advice.

We would like to see one central UK microchip database. However, we recognise that this is increasingly unlikely given the proliferation of commercial databases in recent years. Instead we are calling for:

- All existing and future commercial microchip databases to register with EuroPetNet. Petlog is currently the only UK database to be registered[7].

- Improved enforcement in relation to those databases which do not meet government standards.

- Exploration of the potential for setting up a single point of entry to query existing multiple real-time databases. The facility to enter a microchip number into a single web-based portal that could check all microchip databases would minimise the need for a manual search, increasing efficiency and protecting commercial interests.

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[7] https://www.europetnet.com/member-organisations.html