



**The response of The Royal College of Pathologists'
Specialty Advisory Committee on Veterinary Pathology to the Royal College of
Veterinary Surgeons' Working group on review of Day One Competences**

June 2013

The following comments on the current Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' (RCVS) Day One Competence C1.16 "*Perform a basic gross post-mortem examination, record details, sample tissues, store and transport these*" are made in relation to the role of The Royal College of Pathologists (RCPath) in maintaining standards in the practice of veterinary pathology by graduate veterinarians.

Post-mortem examination (necropsy) is defined as "*an examination of a body after death by a person trained in pathology*".¹ It is well established in veterinary and medical practice that "*Necropsy is an important tool in establishing the cause of death in an individual patient and is also a vital tool for education, evaluation of the effectiveness of therapeutic strategies, quality assessment and control in clinical services, research and in identifying new diseases or manifestations of known diseases*".²

Diagnostic veterinary pathology is covered by the definition of veterinary surgery and is thus subject to the Code of Professional Conduct, which is clear that veterinary surgeons "*be aware of personal limitations*" and that "*veterinary surgeons undertaking procedures on patients must at all stages of their careers be fully competent in their performance, or be under the close supervision of those so competent*".

When setting out Day One Competences in relation to procedures carried out on dead animals, it is therefore essential that the necessary skills are defined clearly in relation to the purpose for which the procedure is performed.

1) Establishing the cause of death in an individual patient

Veterinary clinical practitioners may undertake post-mortem dissection of individual animals for their own interest and education. However, care must be taken to ensure that the veterinary clinician and animal owner are fully aware that such a dissection does not equate with "a gross post-mortem examination undertaken for the purpose of establishing a diagnosis". The limited experience gained from the supervised necropsy of a small number of cases during undergraduate studies would be considered insufficient for the safe assessment and interpretation of the findings during unsupervised post-mortem investigations. This is of particular relevance when the results of necropsy have implications for the treatment, health and welfare of other animals. The legal aspects and potential for conflict of interest when undertaking a post-mortem examination on an animal that died under the clinician's care should also be emphasised.

The competences and knowledge required for such preliminary investigations may be summarised as:



Perform the technical procedures required for a systematic post-mortem investigation and understand the requirements for accurate recording of the observations, the requirements for appropriate sampling and storage, the limitations of such investigations and the potential for conflict of interest.

(2) Evaluation of the effectiveness of therapeutic strategies, quality assessment and control in clinical services, research, and identifying new diseases or manifestations of known diseases

The RCPATH wishes to emphasise the importance of regularly supervised postgraduate training in necropsy techniques and interpretation in order to attain competency, and the importance of assessment and ongoing participation in relevant CPD, in order to maintain the degree of competence in veterinary pathology that is essential for the above activities.

The current RCVS Day One Competence C1.16: “*Perform a basic gross post-mortem examination, record details, sample tissues, store and transport these*”, therefore is of particular relevance in relation to the current proposals contained in *AHVLA Surveillance 2014 and Beyond: A consultation on the future delivery of scanning surveillance for animal related threats in England and Wales*.³ Under these proposals, increased responsibility for undertaking and recording results of post-mortem examinations will rest with clinical practitioners as the AHVLA seeks to reduce the number of subsidised post-mortem examinations it undertakes. The concerns of the RCPATH in relation to these proposals have been communicated to the AHVLA.⁴

In the context of the RCVS’ aim “*to safeguard the health and welfare of animals under veterinary care, protect the interests of those dependent on animals and assure public health*”, the following questions have important implications for the future effectiveness of surveillance for new and re-emerging animal-related threats in England and Wales:

- How does the RCVS equate performance of a “basic gross post-mortem examination” with competence to conduct (and report on) post-mortem examinations for the detection of new and re-emerging diseases?
- Does the RCVS intend to remind veterinary surgeons that, in the absence of formal postgraduate training in pathology, they may lack the necessary competences essential for the conduct of surveillance post-mortem examinations?
- How does the RCVS ensure that the competence C1.16 is rigorously assessed during the statutory examination for membership for overseas veterinarians wishing to practise in the UK?

The RCPATH Specialty Advisory Committee on Veterinary Pathology is willing to discuss these matters further, and looks forward to the response of the RCVS.

References

1. Definition of ‘postmortem examination’ from *Mosby’s Medical Dictionary (8th edition)*. Elsevier, 2009.
2. Dank G, Segev G, Moshe D, Kent MS. Follow-up study comparing necropsy rates and discrepancies between clinical and pathologic diagnoses at a veterinary teaching hospital: 2009 versus 1989 and 1999. *Journal of Small Animal Practice* 2012;53:679–683.
3. *AHVLA Surveillance 2014 and Beyond: A consultation on the future delivery of scanning surveillance for animal related threats in England and Wales*. Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency, 2013. www.defra.gov.uk/ahvla-en/files/surveillance14-consultation.pdf
4. Professor DF Kelly on behalf of the RCPATH’s Specialty Advisory Committee on Veterinary Pathology Working Party. Response of the RCPATH to *AHVLA Surveillance 2014 and Beyond: A consultation on the future delivery of scanning surveillance for animal related*

threats in England and Wales. February 2013. www.rcpath.org/publications-media/college-responses