



# GUIDELINES FOR VISITING SURGEONS IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

## PREAMBLE

The *Veterinary Practice Act 2021* (the Act) requires that a veterinary practice business must be conducted at or from registered veterinary premises. A veterinary practice business means a business that involves the practice of veterinary medicine by one or more registered veterinarians.

Veterinarians operating a business as a 'visiting surgeon' are required to maintain a standard of care as specified in this document.

## APPLICATION OF THESE GUIDELINES

These Guidelines apply from and including 10 December 2024.

These Guidelines may be superseded by subsequent versions. To ascertain whether this version has been superseded, view the current version on the Board's website at [www.vpbwa.org.au](http://www.vpbwa.org.au).

Veterinarians operating a business as a 'visiting surgeon' are responsible for familiarising themselves with the current version of these Guidelines.

## DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of these guidelines:

**Surgery** means any procedure performed on an animal that involves the use of some, usually sharp and metallic, instrument to perform a procedure that exposes otherwise unexposed blood or other body tissues or removes a body part.

**Visiting surgeon** means a registered veterinarian who travels to a specific practice to perform surgeries on behalf of a referring veterinarian or practice.

## INSURANCE

The visiting surgeon is responsible for their insurance requirements and should seek professional advice on public liability insurance and professional indemnity insurance cover.

## PERMITS AND LICENCES

All veterinarians must ensure that they hold the relevant permits and licences necessary for them to practise veterinary surgery, including but not limited to Poisons Permits under the *Medicines and Poisons Act 2014* and Radiation Licences under the *Radiation Safety Act 1975*.

## STANDARDS FOR VISITING SURGEON BUSINESSES IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

1. Subject to the approval of the Board and compliance with applicable statutes, including but not restricted to the *Radiation Safety Act 1975*, and the *Medicines and Poisons Act 2014* a visiting surgeon may provide the following services:
  - a) routine consultative services;
  - b) induction and maintenance of gaseous anaesthesia;
  - c) performance of surgical procedures on animals; and
  - d) advice to referring veterinary colleagues, where applicable and reasonable.
2. The [veterinary premises](#) in which the surgery takes place, must be registered with the Board, and designed, built, equipped, maintained and staffed as required by the Board.
3. The visiting surgeon must ensure that the veterinary premises stocks:
  - a) adequate levels of analgesics, as applicable for orthopaedic and soft tissue surgeries.
  - b) industry accepted antibiotics and other drugs regularly used in routine and advanced surgical cases.
4. It is incumbent on the visiting surgeon to refer, or offer to refer, a patient to a registered specialist veterinarian or a veterinarian capable of performing the procedure when:
  - a) the veterinary practice does not have staff suitably trained and competent in managing a specific surgical case. The visiting surgeon must demonstrate due diligence, with written evidence provided to the Board, if requested, confirming that they have assessed the practice before accepting a surgical case. This assessment must include assurance that the veterinarians and nurses are skilled and capable to:
    - i. assist adequately during the pre-surgical stage of the procedure.
    - ii. assist adequately during the surgical stage of the procedure. In the event that the visiting surgeon has their own veterinary nurse/s, then this requirement is not necessary. However, the visiting surgeon must be able to perform the surgery without any assistance from the staff of the practice.
    - iii. manage the case adequately during the post-surgical stage, until the patient is discharged.
    - iv. manage the case adequately, in an ongoing fashion, once the patient has been discharged.
  - b) the animal requires isolation and / or barrier nursing;
  - c) the diagnosis is unclear or in dispute; or
  - d) the visiting surgeon lacks the equipment or expertise to perform the required investigation or surgery.
5. Following sedation or anaesthesia, a visiting surgeon must remain at the location with the patient, where the procedure was performed, until it is deemed safe and reasonable to leave. The visiting surgeon must communicate with the practice's veterinary and nursing staff to make sure that they are still comfortable to manage the case and any complications that may arise. It is not suitable for a visiting surgeon to take no responsibility for the care of a patient during the post-operative period. However, when the veterinary and nursing staff are assessed as being competent and adequately skilled, this responsibility can be transferred to the veterinary and nursing staff employed by the practice.
6. Visiting surgeons must provide the option for the owner of the animal to have a consultation with them, prior to any procedure being performed.
7. Visiting surgeons must confirm the referring veterinarian's diagnosis before performing surgery.

8. Clinical records and the supply of scheduled drugs must comply with the Board's [Code of Practice](#) No.1 of 2022.
9. Client communication in regard to specialists
  - a) It is the responsibility of the visiting surgeon to ensure that the owner understands whether or not the visiting surgeon is a Board registered specialist surgeon or not. The surgery consent form must clearly indicate this and be signed by the owner.
  - b) It is the responsibility of the visiting surgeon to communicate to the practices that they visit to ensure that the staff involved understand the difference between a general practitioner with a keen interest in surgery, and a Board registered specialist surgeon, so that communication between staff and animal owners reflect the training of the visiting surgeon.

## **DISCLAIMER**

These Guidelines (printed, electronic or any other medium) do not constitute legal advice.

Readers are encouraged to seek their own professional advice to determine their obligations under the Act, subsidiary legislation made under the Act and other applicable laws. It is the responsibility of those persons regulated by the Act to determine their obligations. The authors, the Veterinary Practice Board of Western Australia (**Board**), the members of the Board and the staff of the Board accept no liability for losses caused by reliance on any of the material in these Guidelines.