

# VetPartners Clinical Board Annual Report 2023



Progressing Practice Together

## Welcome!

We are really pleased to share our third VetPartners Clinical Board Annual Report with everyone. For the first time it encompasses work by the Clinical Board across the whole VetPartners group. We feature colleagues from across Europe who have joined the Clinical Board communities with the purpose to support others and progress care together.



At WSAVA in Lisbon we had the first group Clinical Board workshop where we discussed the importance of developing strong clinical communities, between practices and across countries, to discuss clinical care and share ideas. We laid the seeds of ideas for planning future large-scale clinical quality improvement and clinical research projects. Together we can generate new data and knowledge, which we can implement to transform care.

In 2023 in the UK, we were back on the road for the first time since the pandemic with our Clinical Board Roadshows. These events are great fun and bring together our clinical communities across practices in the group, to chat about clinical topics that matter to them. It's the PEOPLE in clinical practice who really make the difference and meeting hundreds of them, from all different roles, explains why we are making so much progress TOGETHER.

The Clinical Board's work is based on the principles of evidence-based medicine, which are all about how we generate useful, relevant evidence for the many different options available when making clinical decisions. In this report we are really proud to present some of our work, which we have had many opportunities to share in 2023 with the wider veterinary profession at conferences and meetings, which has generated some great partnerships.

I can't believe how quickly 2023 flew by with clinical teams facing many challenges. Despite this they have continued to progress care and improve outcomes for patients, clients and themselves. We hope you enjoy reading about our work and if you have some ideas to share, we would love to hear from you.

**Dr Rach Dean, Director of Clinical Research and Excellence in Practice**

**In 2023 we:**

Had 32 active  
Clinical Interest  
Groups

Had 56  
clinical  
meetings

Developed 77  
clinical decision  
making resources

Involved over  
685 people in  
our clinical  
community

**"It's great to be able to share the work of the VetPartners Clinical Board.**

**Our vet-led, practice focussed business means our people and the animals and clients we care for is central to everything we do. Ensuring we have confident clinical teams, who know they are progressing clinical outcomes and providing excellent services to our clients, is key to being a great place to work. Sharing new knowledge and giving something back to the profession and the knowledge base is critical and we are proud of what we achieve together. The growing European community are getting more and more involved too - which is really great to see."**



**Jo Malone, CEO, VetPartners**

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The way we can improve and progress practice most effectively as a group, is through a collective clinical leadership approach. This means that we need to involve people from different practices with different roles, experiences, and ideas.

In the UK our three Species Boards are each made up of ten members with varied roles and experiences from across our practices, and they help to inform and direct the clinical excellence strategy for the group. This provides them with novel career development opportunities and CPD.

The Clinical Interest Groups (CIGs) are for everyone and join people with similar clinical interests together to share knowledge, skills, experience and expertise across VetPartners.

*“Being part of the equine nursing CIG has provided me with a platform to join up with like-minded people to share ideas and collaborate with projects on important issues such as nurse utilisation and antimicrobial awareness. It has been wonderful to share my knowledge and inspire others, while also gaining knowledge from fellow equine nurses to keep my skills current and fresh. Our equine veterinary nursing community is also really helpful if you have a burning question to answer that is not known in your practice, so that’s an added bonus too!”*

**Anna Saul - Equine RVN, Aireworth Vets, Deputy Chair of the Equine Clinical Board**



*“The [Equine Clinical] Board represents our practices, but it does so much more. It leads and co-ordinates clinically relevant research projects, shares data and information across all our teams and allows us to do some really great quality improvement. We also engage with teams and listen to them so we can help deliver what they need to give the best experience possible to clients.”*

**Julia Shrubbs MRCVS, Three Counties Equine Hospital, Chair of the Equine Clinical Board**



Our clinical communities work closely with the Clinical Board Support Team, a central team of vets with prior clinical experience as well as expertise in clinical research, literature searching, data collection, analysis, and the critiquing and reporting of information to name just a few.

*“I love my role working as part of the Clinical Board Support Team. We are a super friendly group and are here to provide help and support to everyone within VetPartners. We are constantly striving to progress care for our patients, as well as helping to make VetPartners a great place to work for our colleagues. My role is focused on supporting the use of evidence-based veterinary medicine throughout VetPartners - this can be supporting our Species Boards to produce and update clinical resources on VetPartners Learning, helping with preparations for clinical meetings and summarising the evidence on new medicines. Anyone can email clinical queries to us to get some input and getting to work with our brilliant network of clinical teams is one of my favourite parts of the job, so if you have anything we can help with please get in touch at [clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk](mailto:clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk).”*

**Dr Kathryn Wareham MRCVS, Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine Manager**



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## Our Clinical Board Roadshows

We were thrilled with the success of our Clinical Board Roadshows in 2023, which offered an excellent opportunity for different practice teams to meet each other, network and further strengthen our clinical communities. We explored a diverse range of topics across species including a sustainable approach to anaesthesia, equine fertility, practical care for camelids, flock health clubs, *Brucella canis*, novel therapeutics, XL Bullies, NSAIDs on farm, the new RCVS under our care guidance and antibiotics to name just a few.



*"The meeting was really stimulating and everyone there felt included and involved. These meetings are ideal for learning, networking and socialising with other practices, so I would heartily recommend attending them. I really enjoyed it and got a lot out of it."*

**Margot Hunter MRCVS, Dunedin Vets (roadshow attendee)**

### Top stats:

- ✓ Four countries
- ✓ 45 practices
- ✓ Eight events
- ✓ ~450 attendees
- ✓ 1714 miles
- ✓ Six dodgy hotels
- ✓ 339 cups of tea and coffee
- ✓ LOTS of pizza!

We could not have anticipated the high level of presence these sessions achieved, with a diverse turnout of different practices, and many team members with different levels of experience and varied roles throughout practice teams. We were overjoyed that team members joined us on days off, the night before going on holiday and even from maternity leave to gain some novel CPD and meet new colleagues! These cross-group sessions allowed us to talk about how far the Clinical Board has come but also where we should go next. The outcomes from the roadshow have already driven our recent work on rabbits, farm NSAIDs and mobility work, as well as our ongoing work on critically important antibiotics. We thank everyone who made these sessions a success, but particularly the Operations Team and hosting practices, without whose support this would not have been possible!

*"The Clinical Board Team were friendly, approachable, and so passionate about the profession and the Clinical Board. From a practice perspective it encouraged the clinical teams to become more involved with everything VetPartners, engaging in further training and taking advantage of the support on offer. It was a great turnout and I thoroughly enjoyed it."*

**Claire Hayes, Practice Manager, Beech House Veterinary Centre (roadshow host)**



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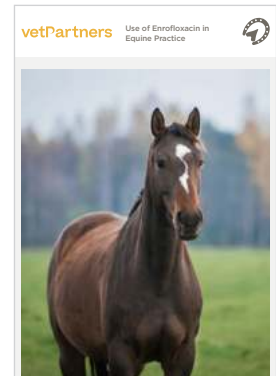
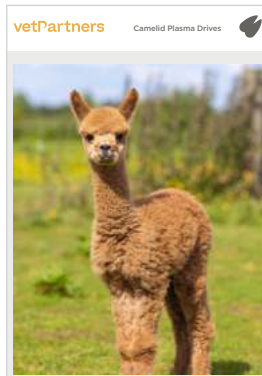
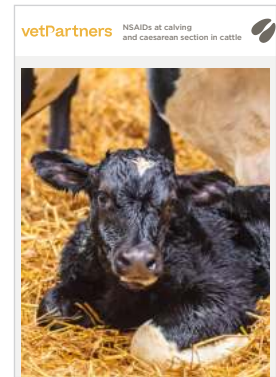
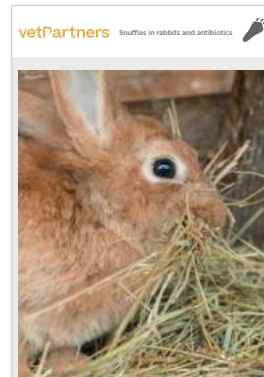
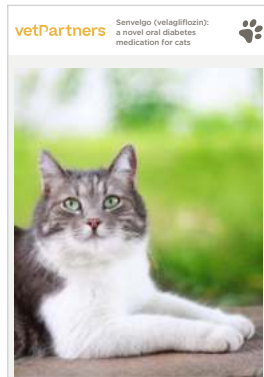
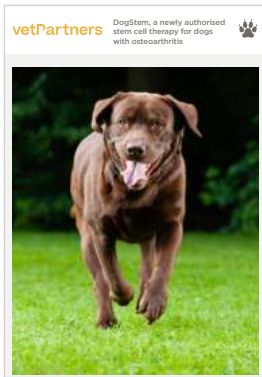




## Developing Resources to Support Clinical Decision Making

Throughout 2023, our Species Boards and Clinical Interest Groups (CIGs) have created numerous evidence-based resources to support our teams in practice, review new medicines which have come on the market and address knowledge gaps that have been reported to us.

Examples of the **77 resources developed** this year include:



We have an extensive range of new and existing resources, spanning across species and available to all of our colleagues at VetPartners. Please visit VetPartners Learning to explore what is available or contact [clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk](mailto:clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk). Don't forget to discuss and share this information with your colleagues.

*"We really like using the Small Animal Clinical Board resources at Westways. We use some, like the local anaesthetic charts, in our prep room. This is a good reminder to use these drugs during as many procedures as possible, as well as checking dosages. We have used several of the documents within the Cefovecin module within practice meetings. Having them premade has really reduced our workload while ensuring we have the most up-to-date information possible. This has helped us to push forward Quality Improvement projects around antibiotics, which our team have really engaged with."*

Jenny Shell MRCVS, Westway Vets



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## Group Clinical Board Meet for First Time in Lisbon

At the World Small Animal Veterinary Association Congress in Lisbon in September 2023, the VetPartners Clinical Board for the whole group met in person for the first time. We had representatives from France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and the Netherlands. Some of the team had been in their roles for some time, some just a matter of weeks, and we worked in numerous languages! However, we all had a common purpose to learn from each other and help teams progress.



### We held a day-long workshop focussed on:

- ✓ Developing clinical communities with a collective clinical leadership approach
- ✓ The principles of evidence-based veterinary medicine and how to apply them to practice
- ✓ The importance of choice and autonomy in clinical decision making
- ✓ Understanding the impact of Clinical Quality Improvement
- ✓ What we know about new products when they come to market



*“The meeting with my Clinical Board colleagues was fun and enlightening. As one of the newest members of VetPartners, working with my colleagues from different countries opened my eyes to the different challenges that we have as veterinarians in different countries. We looked for solutions, getting input and different views from each other. The differences between our countries, but also between practices, should be seen as a strength that we can use to help each other. Working together will ultimately help us become better and happier in our work. Looking critically at how we work and what we use makes us better vets, which is what we want to achieve in the end.”*

**Aline Rodts, Clinical Board Lead for the Netherlands**



*“We have this feeling coming from our small French clinic, of actually belonging to a group, to a family, with the desire to do things together, even if we each have our national specificities. The face-to-face session is a huge plus, because it completely makes this project a reality, and really allows you to see the difficulties and advantages that everyone can have depending on their degree of progress in the project.*

*It allowed me to understand the different problems encountered by everyone, and the solutions to try, or which have already been tried and which allow me to see what could work. The very pragmatic side, and the questioning of what we can be told as truths without sufficient proof was really a huge plus for me.”*

**François-Xavier Bacot, Clinical Board Lead for France**

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## Clinical Quality Improvement

Clinical Quality Improvement (QI) work has continued on optimising surgical outcomes and antibiotic stewardship across all species, but our teams have also audited many other areas of practice and we encourage anyone interested in our QI activities to contact us at [clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk](mailto:clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk)

### Equine castration

Our ongoing equine castration audit has to-date gathered information on 436 castrations with follow up on 288 so far, this shows us that:

- Most were performed standing (81%), and in the horse's own stable (71%).
- 80% received pre/perioperative antibiotics and only 55% received postoperative antibiotics.
- >99% of horses were given at least one analgesic prior to or during surgery.
- 76% had no postoperative complications in the week following surgery.



### Equine catheter complications

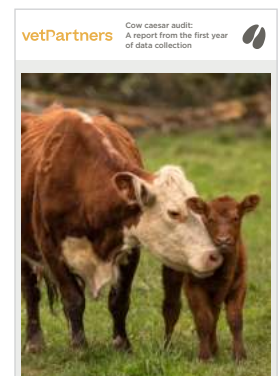
Five of our equine hospitals have been undertaking a six-month audit of IV catheter complications in their patients. At the halfway point, we have collected data on 178 complications, with initial analysis telling us about the characteristics of these complications and the patients affected by them:

- Patients with a catheter complication ranged from 1 day to 28 years old, with a median of 6 years old.
- 26% of complications occurred in horses deemed to be in an 'at risk' category for catheter complications.
- Most complications were minor, such as swelling, which accounted for 30% of complications recorded. Only 9% of all complications recorded involved thrombophlebitis.
- In most cases the outcome was positive, with 92% resolving either without treatment or with short term treatment.

### Cow caesars

In 2023 we continued our QI work looking at cattle caesars. To date we have had 591 responses and some of these data were presented at BCVA in October by Andrew Henderson from LLM Bakewell, Chair of our Farm Animal Clinical Board. We found:

- Around three quarters of calves (74%, 347/468) were alive when the vet left the farm. At 60 day follow up calf survival at 7 days was 74% (81/109) and dam survival to 7 and 60 days was 87% (238/273).
- Dam survival at 60 days was highest for cows who were standing during the procedure, and lowest for those who were recumbent.
- Survival at 60 days was similar in cows given clenbuterol (90%, 135/150) and cows not given clenbuterol (85%, 107/126).



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## Antibiotics

We have continued to monitor our baseline data on the overall use of antibiotics within the business, as well as focussing on specific drugs, for example, critically important antibiotics. Key findings can be found in our **Antibiotic Stewardship Report 2023**. It shows that between January and June 2023:

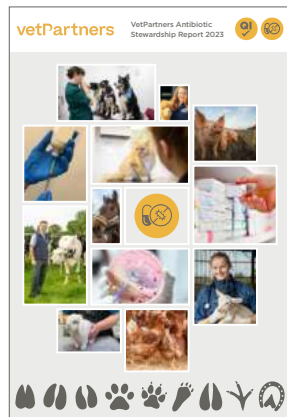


We bought 2,987kg of antibiotics  
(compared to 3,037kg in 2022 and 3070kg in 2021)

On average we bought just over 1.5kg of antibiotics per full-time equivalent vet (compared to 1.86kg in 2022 and 2.17kg in 2021).

Since 2021 we have seen a **22.6% reduction** overall in the amount of antibiotics purchased per full-time equivalent vet!

This is amazing ongoing progress, and we applaud all of our teams for their role in this work.

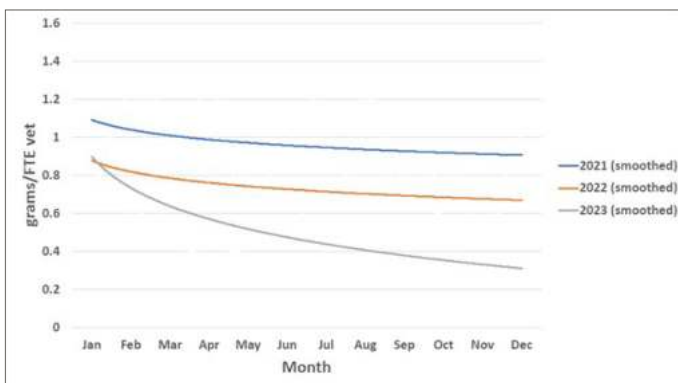


SCAN  
ME



## Enrofloxacin use in small animal practice

Enrofloxacin is a fluoroquinolone antibiotic which is categorised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) as Category B: Restrict, and as a 'highest priority critically important antimicrobial' (HP-CIA) for human health by the World Health Organisation (WHO). This has therefore been a point of focus in our antibiotic stewardship work.



In 2023, total purchasing of enrofloxacin per full-time equivalent vet fell to 6.03 grams (a total fall of 48% from 2021).

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## Clinical Research

### PROJECTFEET

This project explores how the whole mobility team (farmers, foot trimmers, veterinary surgeons and veterinary technicians) perceive the pain associated with various lameness-causing conditions and make choices about managing these conditions, including when and whether to use NSAIDs.

**We were thrilled to have this research published in the Vet record in October 2023 and make the cover of the paper edition in March!**

You can access this paper here: <https://bvajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/vetr.3412>

### PROJECTDRAPES

'Drapes in Routine Aseptic Procedures for Environmental Sustainability'.

Our first randomised controlled trial across VetPartners practices, which started in 2022, aims to see whether using disposable drapes in routine surgeries gives different patient outcomes compared with using washable, reusable drapes, which have less lifetime environmental impact.

**We have been making brilliant progress; training nine practices, with a total of 394 neuters recruited to date. We have also submitted our protocol for publication.**

### PROJECTNURSE

'Nurturing and Utilising R(E)VN Skills and Experience'

This ongoing project aims to improve animal health and welfare by addressing the strong interest among our equine nursing teams in developing their clinical roles and providing more client-facing services. We have had a brilliant response so far and analysed data from 347 horse owners.

**We were thrilled to have presented some of these results at BEVA in September and to have had a paper accepted for publication in the Vet Record which can be accessed here: <https://bvajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/vetr.4148>**

### PROJECTWORMS

'Working to Overcome Resistance and Make for a Sustainable future'

Project WORMS recognises that veterinary teams and owners need to work together to tackle resistance to worming products. A responsible approach to the use of wormers is crucial to maximise animal welfare and ensure we have effective products available in the future.

**Data from this project were presented at BEVA in September, with Julia Shrubbs presenting owner data and winning the Sam Hignett award and Camilla Scott presenting the stud data.**

We are currently drafting papers for publication.

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## Research Highlights

**Two BCVA abstracts** looking at outcomes following cow caesareans and approaching and recognising lameness in dairy cattle.



**Six BSAVA abstracts** on a range of topics including feline critically important antibiotics, variation in practice, clinical freedom and evidence-based decision making and whether intratesticular lidocaine reduces isoflurane use during dog castrations.

We have awarded **six prizes** to vets and vet nurses to mark **excellence in clinical research**. Four awards were for abstracts or papers, as well as two awards for new, early-stage projects.



‘Veterinary surgeons’, veterinary nurses’ and owners’ experiences of feline telemedicine consultations during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic’ **was one of The Veterinary Record’s top 10 most-cited papers published.**



**Twelve BEVA abstracts** focussing on a range of topics including progressing the clinical roles of veterinary nurses, post-anaesthetic surgical site complications in horses, antibiotic stewardship in equine practice, parasite control practices and increased risk of fatal laminitis during hospitalisation amongst phallectomy patients compared to laparotomy patients in a UK equine hospital over 10 years.

We were also thrilled to see our clinicians win both the Sam Hignett Award and HBLB Award.

You can read more about this here:

<https://www.beva.org.uk/News/Latest-News/Details/BEVA-announces-new-Award-Winners>

Across our teams we have also published over **20 papers and articles**, examples include:

*‘Is body size associated with a dog’s risk of experiencing an adverse reaction to vaccination?’*

*‘High-Resolution Genotyping of Expressed Equine MHC Reveals a Highly Complex MHC Structure’*

*‘Ten resources for understanding bias in health research’*

and

*‘How do different members of the on-farm mobility team perceive lameness, and what factors influence their NSAID use?’*



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## #Wearefamily



We are very open to collaboration in clinical research. Working together with others who share our interests and values is the best way to keep progressing practice.

We are also happy to support and distribute a wide variety of projects from undergraduate and postgraduate colleagues, provided they fulfil our three basic criteria:

- They are relevant to colleagues within VetPartners
- They have appropriate ethical review
- A summary of results can be shared with us so we know what they found out

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If you have a research project you'd like to carry out or participate in, get in touch at [clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk](mailto:clinical.board@vetpartners.co.uk) to find out how we can help.

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