

Obtaining owner consent remotely

The following guidance has been produced by Carol Gray and is intended to provide guidance in obtaining consent to veterinary treatment during the measures in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.

How can you ensure that you are still obtaining informed consent, when you may not be dealing with the owner, or you are speaking to the owner via video or telephone call?

The first important thing to remember is that consent doesn't have to be in writing. Verbal consent is fine, but it might be useful to record it in some way in case of later dispute. In these days of smartphone and video technology, recording the consent conversation is possible and, in many cases, superior to filling in a consent form! You must obtain the client's consent to record the conversation, but this does not have to be recorded – here, verbal consent is definitely sufficient.

Many practices insist on two people hearing verbal consent over the phone – this is not necessary, but if you cannot record the conversation, it is helpful to write it down immediately afterwards.

THE CONVERSATION

When obtaining consent from the owner or their authorised agent, the main things to include in the conversation are as follows:

1. Check that the right person is giving consent. Ask the question "are you the animal's owner?" If the answer is no, then check "do you have the owner's permission to give consent for this procedure?" If the answer is yes, to either question, that is all you need to do, but it is useful to record this bit of the conversation too.
2. Outline the options for treatment, risks and benefits of each one. If only one option, clarify the risks involved. Include death as a risk for any procedure requiring GA. Check understanding at regular intervals, just by pausing, and asking if the client has any questions.
3. Clearly outline the costs involved, estimated as accurately as possible.
4. Carry out a final check as to whether the client has any concerns or questions.
5. Ask the client to give their authorisation for the chosen treatment. A simple statement such as "I give my consent to (procedure)" is fine, or you can ask "Do you give your consent to (procedure)?" and record their answer.

In an emergency, the process will inevitably be shortened, but must still include confirmation of ownership or agency, risks and costs as a minimum, plus an affirmation of consent.

If your practice records phone calls anyway, then you are all sorted. (Follow practice policy for the secure storage of phone call recordings).

Here are a couple of useful links for recording video calls:

From **Skype** <https://support.skype.com/en/faq/FA12395/how-do-i-record-my-skype-calls>

From **Zoom** <https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/203066759-Recording-on-iOS-and-Android>

DATA PROTECTION

Remember that the recordings should be attached to the client's records or stored securely on your practice management system (PMS). All recordings must be protected in the same way as other personal data. This means that if recording on your phone, you must upload the recording to a secure site as soon as possible (probably the PMS, either locally or cloud based, provided it's a password protected site). **You must then delete the original recording from your phone.** The uploaded recording then becomes the consent form and should be stored for a similar length of time as your other client records.

If you have any specific queries about consent, please contact Carol on Twitter **@vetconsent**