We are occasionally contacted when something has gone wrong at the vets and the owner is wondering what action to take. Our sympathies are with the owners following any incident but we are unfortunately unable to discuss individual cases or recommend specific treatment, although your vets are welcome to contact our veterinary advisor for specific advice. Don’t forget we hold a list of rabbit friendly practices throughout the UK so please get in touch with us to see who is on the list in your area. This list is accessible to everyone, you do not need to be a member; we want as many rabbit owners as possible to be in safe hands.

Ensure the ongoing care of your rabbit

If you do find yourself in the unfortunate position of having a bad experience with your vet there are two issues; the first is obtaining the best possible on-going care for your rabbit. This may be with your existing practice, with another practice, by obtaining a second opinion, or by being referred to another practice, particularly one with a specific expertise in rabbits, or the particular condition with which your rabbit is affected. This MUST involve communicating your concerns with the practice, to give them a chance to give you the greatest level of assistance possible, and to ensure that, if your rabbit is seen elsewhere, that all his or her details are transferred fully to best care for him or her.

Try to resolve the complaint with the Practice direct

The second issue is to resolve any complaint that you may have with the vet or the practice, if necessary. The first stage in this process is to discuss things fully with the senior person (practice owner, principle or manager) at the practice in question. If the practice is part of a group or chain, you may then, or if unsatisfied, decide to take the matter higher up the management line. The best way to initially communicate is in writing, as this gives you an opportunity to order your thoughts and to express them logically, and for them to reply to that. Although it can be hard to do, stick to the facts, avoid emotions and feelings. Depending on the outcome at this stage, you may both decide to meet and discuss things further. If these avenues have not solved the problem, then the correct course of action is to take the matter to the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (the RCVS).
try to resolve this with your Vet or Vet Nurse first, and put your complaint in writing. If this does not resolve it to your satisfaction you can then raise it with them, on-line via their website:

http://findavet.rcvs.org.uk/complaints/i-want-to-make-a-complaint/

**What can the RCVS do and not do?**

The RCVS can investigate complaints, give formal advice, hold public hearings in the case of criminal offences taking place or serious misconduct, and ultimately suspend or remove any Vet or Vet Nurse from the Register.

They can not impose fines, award compensation, adjudicate on negligence (this is for the criminal courts) or adjudicate on the fees that a Vet Practice charge.

Remember that different Vets would take different approaches to treat the same problem. We often joke that if you put 5 Vets in a room you will get 6 treatment plans. Just because a Vet has done something different to a colleague does not mean they have been negligent, or that the treatment is not effective. A misdiagnosis may not mean a professional negligence has taken place.

**What are your rights?**

All Vets should have professional indemnity insurance. If you feel as if you have a case of negligence, or are out of pocket then you may be eligible to be compensated or reimbursed from this insurance. This would be something you would need to discuss with the Vet Practice in the first instance.

**Examples:**

1. Belina took her rabbit Merlin to the vet for his annual vaccinations. As far as she was aware he was fit and well, and she had no reason to expect there to be any problems in the consultation. Unfortunately, when the Vet removed Merlin from the carrier he did so by scruffing him and holding him at arms length, hence not supporting the body. Merlin sustained a fracture in his spine as a result. Merlin’s care was transferred to another vet practice and a complaint was raised against the first vet. In this case we would advise that a complaint was put in writing and the vets insurers were contacted with regard to the costs of the ongoing care for Merlin. Although an agreement may be reached in house with regards to the costs of treatment, in this case we would also advise that the RCVS should be notified as additional training may be recommended.

2. Mandy took her young rabbit Marmite in to be spayed. She had a pre op check the week before and was given a clean bill of health. Mandy checked that the Vet was going to intubate during the procedure, that all modern equipment was being used and was confident that Marmite would be OK. Very sadly, Marmite died during the procedure.

Sadly, this is something that no-one can predict, and there is always a risk with anaesthesia. This would not be a case for negligence. In theory you would still be required to pay the bill for the spay although some practices might chose not to enforce this.

**Summary**

It is essential to find a rabbit savvy vet for your rabbits. Do this now, don't wait until there is a problem, no one wants to be ringing round in a panic trying to find a rabbit friendly vet when you have an ill rabbit or an emergency. Our rabbit friendly vet list is a good place to start, but ask questions, and make sure you are happy that you are in good hands. Now that vaccination only requires one vet visit a year it is a good idea to take the rabbits in 6 months after the vaccination for a check up, check teeth, and get them weighed as many problems have been spotted in a routine check. If you do encounter a problem then be polite, but make sure the Practice are aware of it and are given the opportunity to correct it. You may help other rabbit owners by bringing a problem to their attention. And lastly, remember that as a paid up member of The RWAF, you can ask your Vet to contact our Specialist Vet Advisor Richard Saunders for advice.