ARE YOU REGISTERED AND/ OR IS YOUR EMPLOYEE REGISTERED?

As we all know, in order to practise as a veterinarian in South Africa it is compulsory to register with the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC). The reason behind this is threefold: 1. To protect the patient, 2. To protect the public, and 3. To protect the veterinary profession. Registration is a “guarantee” that the veterinarian has achieved a minimum standard of knowledge and practical expertise which will put him/her in a position to competently examine and treat the patient, as well as giving the public the trust that the person tending to their animals should have the competence to do so.

As far as the profession is concerned, registration is a means of ensuring that you should be able to rely on your colleagues having the necessary knowledge and competence to go about their profession. Those of us who graduated through Onderstepoort can be thankful for an excellent grounding, something we very often take for granted. Many of the vets graduating around the world are not as fortunate as us, and their level of competence is very often limited, especially in the South African context. This is where the registration requirements of the SAVC help in ensuring that foreign graduates meet the levels of expertise expected of them before they can practise in this country.

This is all very well, but registration needs to be maintained. It is not a once-off registration and each year it is our responsibility to maintain our registration status by paying the annual registration fee and keep up to date with CPD. Unlike a motor vehicle licence, annual registration doesn’t come with a renewal disc that needs to be displayed for everyone to see. As a result it is invariably taken in good faith that the veterinarian is in fact registered to practice. The original registration certificate that is so proudly displayed in the vet’s consulting rooms or office is NOT proof that this registration has been maintained and knowledge kept up to date.

Various factors may lead to a veterinarian’s registration lapsing or being cancelled, but probably the most common reasons would be failure to pay the annual maintenance fee, and this could be accidental or intentional. Having myself been in a situation where my financial position became so dire that I couldn’t afford the maintenance fee, I know how easily this situation can snowball and one year in arrears becomes more. All the while you are trying to honestly provide the best honourable service to the public upholding all (other) professional ethics. Unfortunately at some stage this catches up with you and this is invariably due to a public complaint about some or other service you have rendered to the best of your ability but with which they are unhappy. Complaints reach the Council and the lapsing of your registration comes to the Council’s notice. What follow is not pleasant, and could be worse if you are found guilty of misconduct in the case of the client’s complaint.

Another aspect that is often overlooked is to check on the registration when employing a new veterinarian. The candidate is hopefully asked to produce his / her registration certificate, but does one ever consider verifying this with Council and ensuring that there are no possible restrictions or problems with the person’s registration? An even more likely problem to arise is when one employs a colleague who studied with you or is of the same generation and who you know well or knew casually as a student. It doesn’t feel right to have to suspect anyone of wrong-doing until proven otherwise, but it is probably the safer route to follow as an employer, or you too could become involved in the unpleasantries that follow a Council investigation.

Registration doesn’t make you a better veterinarian but it definitely makes you a legal one. This will also entitle you to the support of the SAVC when needed— they’re not always the “bad guys”! Safeguard yourself and maintain your registration and always verify a new employee’s registration status if you have a problem, don’t sit on it— contact your Councillors who are always ready to be of assistance where they can.

Dr Donald Leask

Maintenance fees: 1 April 2010 payment is due by 30 June 2010. Invoices have been issued on 1 April 2010. Please contact the administration if you did not receive your invoice and or remittance advice with this Newsletter at: bookkeeper@savc.org.za and registration@savc.org.za.

Registration of facilities: All veterinary clinical services must be rendered from a registered facility. An audit is currently being conducted and principals of facilities have been requested to update their facility details. Members are thanked for their cooperation in this regard.

Registration of Close corporations: Please note that only original application forms and accompanying documents posted by surface mail can be accepted. This requirement applies to all applications including registration of persons and facilities.