In terms of the provisions of the Consumer Protection Act, Act 68 of 2008 (the Act), you, as the provider of private veterinary services, are a service provider providing services in terms of the Act. You should therefore provide a client with an estimate of costs (section 20 of the Act).

In order to accommodate the peculiar requirements of the veterinary profession, the rules for the veterinary profession which came into effect on 9 November 2015, rule 9 were drafted to ensure that the veterinarian does not fall foul of the requirements of the Act.

Rule 9: Estimate of fees

(1) A veterinary professional must inform the client in charge of an animal in respect of which a service is to be rendered of the approximate fee which he/she intends to charge for such service:

(a) As soon as practically reasonable after the patient was examined;

(b) In the event of an emergency as soon as the patient is stabilised; and

(c) When a service is required in addition to the original service anticipated.

(2) Fees for standard procedures may be advertised in the reception area, in which event an estimate of fees need not be given to the client.

(3) The veterinarian must, on an ongoing basis, unless if an emergency, keep the client up to date with the costs and inform the client if more expenses are to be incurred in treating the patient successfully.

(4) Any veterinary professional claiming payment from a person in respect of any service rendered by him/her must furnish such person with an itemised account as soon as possible but not later than 30 days after the service was rendered.

Council resolved at its meeting held on 26 & 27 July 2016 to advise the profession, that for purposes of professional conduct and to satisfy the requirements of the Act, the members can quote for travel and consultation based on an initial diagnosis, and afterwards on a time and travel basis.

It is advisable that members prominently inform clients that the quotation is an estimate only, and that an upward adjustment may be required based on tests and/or procedures required, the peculiar nature of veterinary services, and a possible sudden onset of an emergency situation (even if operating on or treating an otherwise healthy patient, spays, adverse allergic reactions, etc. This communication with your clients would be very helpful in the event that a client questions the costs of your services. ■