

Checklist

- Wait for the confirmed list of issues*
- Review the medical records*
- Get the perspectives of others*
- Provide the names of other witnesses*
- Address only the issues*
- Get permission to submit records*
- Submit only materials relating to the issues*
- Remain professional*
- Keep emotions out of your response*
- Explain only your role*
- Don't assign blame*
- Don't contact the complainant*
- Be patient*



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*Ontario Association of
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Responding to a Complaint

**Member's
Guide**

An Open & Transparent Process

While the investigation of complaints made against its members is one of the main functions of any self-regulating profession, receiving a formal complaint about your professional conduct may be one of the most stressful and upsetting events in your career as a Registered Veterinary Technician. The OAVT complaints process is designed to ensure that members are treated fairly in the investigation of any complaint while fulfilling its new mandate of regulating the profession in the public interest.

This information brochure is designed to assist you in your efforts to respond to a complaint while explaining the open and transparent processes used by the complaints committee.

Clarifying Issues

Before making any attempt to respond to a complaint, you should first wait for the committee to clarify the complainant's issues. In this way, you can focus on addressing the complainant's main concerns and avoid offering explanations to things that were not of concern — the classic “barking up the wrong tree” phenomenon. This part of the process may take several weeks following receipt of the original letter of complaint.

Next, you should consult the medical record to review how events relating to the complaint were originally documented. Even if you have a great memory, you should know that the complaints committee will rely heavily on the medical record for the best description of those events.

Other Witnesses

Once the issues have been clarified, it is then time for the committee to discuss the events of the case with others to get their perspective. Rather than solicit submissions from co-workers and submit them to the committee yourself, it is preferable to identify these witnesses to the committee and let the committee approach them directly for a submission. Third party witness accounts are more valuable to the committee when those witnesses are seen as neutral. While you may not knowingly influence the submissions of others, your approaching them can give that impression.

Any response you submit to the complaint should be professional and focus on the issues. Sentences charged with emotion should be avoided and straying from the list of identified issues runs the risk of lengthening the investigation and worse, opening your conduct up to additional scrutiny.

Materials to Submit

If you work in a veterinary practice and wish to submit medical records, diagnostic images or perhaps other items to assist in the investigation, it is important that you first get the consent of the practice manager or facility director. Before doing this however, you should determine the necessity of making such submissions. If the complaint relates to the quality of a radiograph taken by you, then it seems logical to submit the films in question for the committee to review. But if the complaint only relates to the hematoma that resulted while you were establishing an intravenous access, submitting those films is unnecessary as they bear no relation to the concerns raised by the complainant.

Outcomes

It is natural to want to know what consequences might arise from the investigation of a complaint. The complaints committee is a screening committee and its principle mandate is to determine whether or not any given complaint should be referred to the discipline committee or the fitness to practice committee. Statistically the percentage of complaint cases referred to either of these committees is small but you should know that this is one possible outcome of the investigation. The complaints committee may also decide to take no further action, require you to receive a caution or it may take some other action that is appropriate under the circumstances and permissible under the Association's by-laws. The committee may also decide that a complaint is frivolous, vexatious or an abuse of process and take no further action.

The committee is composed of five individuals; one is a Director of the Association, two are RVT members who are not Directors and two more are members of the public who are not members of the profession.

At the conclusion of its investigation, the committee will produce a written decision with reasons that is provided to both you and the complainant.

In some cases, the committee may decide that a complaint would be better handled by entering into some form of alternate dispute resolution rather than conducting a full investigation. These cases are typically identified early in the process and require your consent as well as that of the complainant. Any resolution arising from this process must be satisfactory to you and the complainant and must be ratified by the committee.