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ANIMALS NEED PRESCRIPTIONS TOO

This month we would like to explain the rules regarding the supply of prescription drugs to animals.

With human medicines, there are some drugs that cannot be supplied without seeing a doctor and getting a prescription, and others that you can buy over the counter at the pharmacy. The situation is exactly the same with veterinary medicines.

The rules regarding supply of medication to animals are set by the government. Many veterinary medications (such as antibiotics, anti-inflammatories and eye/ear ointments) are classified as Schedule 4 drugs (anything with Prescription Animal Remedy OR Prescription Only Medicines on the label). These drugs can only be supplied to a patient that is **under the direct care** of the veterinarian – they cannot be purchased over the counter. Supply of these medications has been restricted in this way in order to minimise problems such as development of antibiotic resistance through inappropriate use and the presence of antibiotic residues in the food chain.

With companion animals (including horses), **under the direct care** means the individual animal must have been seen for the purpose of diagnosis **immediately before** prescription and supply of that medication. In other words, the animal needs to have a consultation with the veterinarian before it can receive any medication. For chronic conditions (such as skin allergies or arthritis), repeats of medication can be supplied without a consultation but the animal must be seen by a veterinarian regularly (at least every 6-12 months) to assess the ongoing efficacy of the medication and the need for any alteration to dose rate, or type of medication.

The rules are slightly different for production animals (such as cattle and sheep) – **under the direct care** means that the veterinarian must have a valid relationship with the owner and their animals, including **personal knowledge** of the condition of the animals and/or current health status of the herd/flock. The animals must have been **seen recently enough or often enough** that the veterinarian can make a diagnosis and prescribe medication for that diagnosed disease. In practical terms, if we have not seen a production animal within the past 12 months, we are **legally precluded** from supplying any medication for those animals.

The most common request we receive that causes confusion (and sometimes frustration) is for antibiotics for production animals. If we have never seen your animals before, or have not seen them for more than 12 months, we cannot give you any antibiotics. It would be like walking into the pharmacy and expecting to receive antibiotics without a prescription.

The only exception to this rule is if we have a written prescription from another veterinarian. It must be written – verbal consent over the phone is not sufficient any more.

From a purely financial perspective, we would benefit if we ignored the law and sold medication to everyone who requested it. However, if we want to stay in business as a veterinary clinic, we are required to comply with the laws governing supply of medication.

Hopefully the rules are now a bit clearer. We are genuinely interested in the health and happiness of your pets and stock and we will do everything we can (legally) do to keep them that way. Please make an appointment or give us a call if you think your pets or stock may need some medication – we are here to help.

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