



# VETERINARY SURGEONS BOARD OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## Summary of Disciplinary Tribunal Debarking of dog July 2004

### Complaint

The complaint concerned a dog taken by its owner to be surgically debarked by a veterinary surgeon. The vet performed the operation to debark the dog. The dog did not recover well from the surgery and continued to cough and have difficulty breathing, eating and drinking. Several days after the surgery, the owner returned the dog to the vet – the dog's throat was examined under anaesthetic. The owner returned the dog again a few days later, and the dog's throat was again examined under anaesthetic. Antibiotics and a vitamin were prescribed by the vet. The dog did not recover and the owner took the dog to another vet for a second opinion. Reluctant to anaesthetize the dog again so quickly, the vet prescribed antibiotic, cortisone, bronchodilator and a prescription diet. The dog did not respond and so the vet carried out exploratory surgery. 20cm of endotracheal tubing was removed from the dog's trachea.

The owner made a complaint to the Registrar about the treatment given by the first veterinarian. Subsequently, the veterinarian contacted the owner's husband and offered \$1000 if the complaint was withdrawn.

The Disciplinary Tribunal found four counts of unprofessional conduct:

1. The veterinary surgeon did not adequately explore the circumstances in which the dog's barking was said to create a problem, nor did he adequately attempt to determine the underlying cause of the problem. He did not discuss with the owners what options had been tried to cure the problem, or suggest other options that might cure the problem, prior to performing the debarking surgery.
2. The veterinarian failed to effectively monitor the dog while it was in the practice recovering from the anaesthesia, and failed to ensure that the staff member monitoring the dog was sufficiently trained to do so. Further, the staff member was not supervised by the veterinarian.
3. The veterinary surgeon was negligent in his aftercare of the dog.
4. The veterinarian improperly attempted to persuade the owner of the dog to withdraw the complaint by offering the sum of \$1000 to do so.

### Determination

The veterinary surgeon pleaded guilty to unprofessional conduct. The Disciplinary Tribunal recognized the guilty plea, and as a result

1. Formally reprimanded the veterinary surgeon for actions which the Board considered to constitute unethical and negligent conduct



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2. Imposed conditions on the veterinarian's right to practice in relation to performing debarking operations
3. Required that a proper system and procedure of anaesthetic recording and monitoring must be established within the practice within one month, and that the records would be inspected by the Board at 3 monthly intervals for the next 12 months
4. Required that \$1000 in costs be paid to the Registrar of the Board

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