



Deer Veterinarians And Quality Service Adrian Campbell

Introduction

Since the late 1980s the NZ Deer Industry has been guided by the NZ Game Industry Board into the concept of Quality Assurance. Progressively, different sectors of the industry have become aligned to their own Quality Assurance Programme. An on-farm QA Programme is now being accepted by the grass roots deer farmer. As deer veterinarians, we are an integral part of the deer Industry. It is now timely that the question of a QA programme (including Quality Improvement) for deer veterinarians is addressed.

This paper is a discussion document, presenting different perspectives on Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI) for deer veterinarians under the following subject headings;

- i. The Concept of Quality Service, Quality Assurance (QA) and Quality Improvement (QI)
- ii. The General Structure of QA Programmes.
- iii. Other Veterinary QA Programmes.
- iv. Components of a Deer Veterinarians QA/QI Programme.
- v. Management and Funding.
- vi. The Profession's Perspective, with or without QA/QI.
- vii. Deer Veterinarians Perspective, with or without QA/QI.
- viii. Where to from now?

1. The concept of quality assurance and quality improvement

Quality Assurance (QA)

A QA Programme provides the proof that a required standard of quality has been attained in the product or outcome. Adhering to a QA programme does not necessarily give assurance of producing the absolute pinnacle of excellence by way of product or outcome. Instead it provides the purchaser with the assurance that the product they receive matches *their* expectations of quality. It therefore follows that quality can mean different things to different people.

For example the motor car brands of Lada and Lexus could fulfill QA programme expectations in their respective factories and satisfy their end consumer. However, it is obvious that the relative "quality" of these two cars is grossly different. Hence it must always be remembered that for QA, the required standard of quality must match the

consumers expectations. Under delivery is disastrous and over delivery may not be appreciated nor rewarded.

Quality Improvement (QI)

The concept of QI is different to the concept of QA. QI is the process of setting certain quality standards and then going about the process of raising current production standards to that higher target standard. QA then provides the proof that this is occurring. Both QA and QI in this case are an integral parts of a **Quality Service**.

As an example the Lada could conceivably become a Lexus by assessing the Lexus buyers' expectation on Quality and enhancing the aspects that do not come up to specification. (However, if the only buyer is the Lada buyer then QI would probably not be worthwhile for the service deliverer).

The Deer Vet Profession

The deer veterinary profession must therefore consider **two components** for the future concept of Quality Service, that is QA and QI!

QA provides the assurance that a quality service **is** being offered. Any argument as to whether this suggests that the Profession is not currently providing a quality service is irrelevant.

QI is the process by which current services are improved to match any increased demand from the purchaser (in this case the farmer client). The Profession must determine at what level of quality the QA service is to occur before the onset of QA. It could be proposed that the profession fragment certain services such as specialist embryo transplant and AI work from general practice to establish a realistic level of quality to base QA on (see the discussion under 4 -Components of a Deer Vet QA Programme). Hence QI is an inherent part of introducing a QA Programme and QI is also available on an on going basis.

A proposed aim of a deer veterinarians QA/QI Programme could be;

That NZ Deer Farmers receive consistently a satisfactory level of service from NZ deer veterinarians

To ensure that this aim does satisfy the Quality expectations of Deer farmers careful deliberation in consultation would need to occur.

2. The general structure of QA programmes

Within each QA Programme there are variations but in general the following characteristics exist;

1. Defined Quality Standards.
2. Methodology For Measurement of those Standards.

3. Training to achieve Standards.
4. Structure for Entry Assessment (either self or independent).
5. Provision of a Manual containing all relevant data and standards.
6. A Defined Audit Programme for ongoing Assessment of Standards.
7. Review of Standards and Performance.

3. Other QA and associated programmes

Deer veterinarians have been involved in other programmes that either in themselves are a QA Programme or are associated with QA. These are as follows;

1. Velvet Removal Training Programme for Lay Harvesters.
2. On Farm QA Programme for Deer Farmers.
3. Tuberculosis QA Programme.
4. Companion Animals Standards Accreditation.

4. Components of a deer veterinarian's QA/QI programme

A general description of a deer veterinarians QA/QI Programme is a structure involving *standards*, a *manual*, an *entry examination* and an ongoing independent *audit* along with a *review* of expected delivery standards. The components of deer veterinary practice must be identified and standards applied to each. Such components would include the following;

1. *Theoretical Knowledge*

- Reproduction
- Production including nutrition
- Trace element status and supplementation
- Parasitism and control
- Disease identification, pathogenesis and control
- Prescription Animal Remedies and Over The Counter Drugs
- Exempt Activities*

2. *Practical Professional skills*

- Velvetting
- Obstetrics
- Testing for Tuberculosis
- General surgery and anaesthesia
- Deer handling skills and restraint
- Critical post mortem techniques
- Exempt Activities *

3. *General Standards of Delivery*

- Promptness for arrival.
- Response time for delivery of service

- Referral Procedures
 - Quality of communications , written and verbal
 - Problem resolution
 - Ease of availability for service
- (* See discussion under QI Definition)

Each of the above areas of skills and knowledge are vast subjects in their own right. The above list is *not exhaustive* and would need to be updated regularly.

Considerable thought would need to be applied to the formation of a Standards manual. Such a manual could not be a textbook with detailed data but more a manual setting out the required level of performance for each skill along with reference data.

5. Funding and management

Funding

The exact amount in dollars for the entry, annual and on-going audit fees, could only be estimated at this stage. Costs will vary depending on the level of support by the deer vet profession. Maximal participation would lead to economy of scale and the converse would hold. It would therefore require an accurate assessment of the profession's support to provide an accurate estimate of costs to the individual veterinarian. Fair to say though that the initial and ongoing expenses would be *reasonably substantial* in comparison to other everyday practice expenses. It is probable that the deer veterinarian would bear the expense of this Programme. This expense is unlikely to become cost recovery from the client but rather another expense relating to protecting our role in the deer industry.

Management

Previous experience of other QA Programmes indicate a substantial management input is required to initiate a QA/QI Programme , guide it through the developing stages and then handle the significant work load of a fully operational Programme.

QA/QI Programmes to have credibility must keep accurate records, supply and receive accurate information, provide in some cases independent assessment as well as audit and other functions.

The question of who or what Body is responsible for the management outlined above is complex. It should in theory be possible for an outside third party to administer such a programme. However, the absence of intimate knowledge of the veterinary profession would be a disadvantage in some issues. Such an outside third party would administer this programme on a commercial profit making basis. This may rankle with some.

The other option is keep the management of a deer veterinarians QA\QI programme in-house by utilizing the NZVA structure for administration. This would be advantageous in many ways, but such a role may well fall outside the boundaries of current NZVA activities. The Deer Branch of NZVA in its own right may contemplate this role but all of the same comments would apply as to the NZVA itself.

A third option would be to form a QA Programme limited liability company.

The issue as to who manages what is complex.

6. The profession's perspective

The QA concept that the NZ Game Industry Board is promoting is one of Deer Industry wide involvement. This has had the support of the **Profession** at all times. It follows then that as the Deer Industry draws to a close the last remaining sectors for QA, that the Deer Veterinary Profession feels some *obligation* to complete that concept. That is, there is some *industry moral obligation* to become QA aligned.

As the profession begins to explore the issue of Annual Registration to practice and the prerequisites that would need to be fulfilled in the way of ongoing education, QA may well become *that* requirement. This is an issue that would be handled by the Veterinary Council but clearly would be handled in conjunction with the profession. Immediate involvement in QA may therefore position the deer veterinarians well for the future.

Veterinarians in all types of practice are constantly being challenged to share or even surrender previously vet-only type work. QA would position veterinarians well to protect our current role as service providers to the deer industry. Sceptics may doubt that there is any chance of our position being eroded but history would tell us that we need to make our position as secure as possible.

From recent audit results of the Velvetting Training Programme hard evidence would indicate that there is considerable variation of delivery of service by experienced veterinarians. This variation of service would unlikely be confined to the Velvetting Programme only. Hence QA and QI would have direct beneficial advantages to the profession in getting our house in order especially in the context of wider deer industry QA.

Should the deer veterinary profession decide to follow QA/QI and utilize the NZVA structure for management and funding, then considerable exposure will occur until the QA Programme is fully developed. The risk relates to a voluntary QA Programme attracting enough critical mass support and from this are obvious financial implications. The other options identified for management and funding do not attract the same downside.

Should QA and QI become the basis for on-going veterinary registration then compulsory participation will rule out the risk of poor veterinary support. (However, if the profession is interested in moving ahead quickly on QA/QI, then waiting for a Veterinary Council ruling on on-going registration would probably be unwise). It would be the *opinion* of the author that a far healthier outcome would result if the voluntary nature of this proposed programme was retained. If a programme as this is to succeed then the reasons for its existence must be real and not promulgated by any compulsory measures.

There are clear risks associated with adopting a QA/QI Programme. There are also clear risks associated in *not* adopting a Programme. The NZ veterinary profession, especially

through the NZ Veterinary Association, has not been scared of hard decisions in the past. The decision of this programme must therefore be given due consideration.

7. Deer veterinarian's perspective

Deer farmers using veterinary services are likely to become more demanding for the provision of QA Veterinary *Quality Service*, as they themselves continue in the concept of on-farm QA. The above paragraphs refer to the risk associated with poor veterinary support. Any risk associated with *poor farmer* support would be even more dire. So while it seems likely that the farmer demand would increase, we as veterinarians all know how resistant deer farmers are to any additional services that cost money, despite the value. Any QA/QI Programme would therefore become an academic white elephant if it was not utilised by NZ deer farmers.

Veterinary practices may well develop their own independent QA/QI Programme to cater for this farmer demand. However, the profession has a great opportunity to develop an integrated whole profession approach to QA/QI. Such an approach would allow veterinarians the opportunity to market their expertise on a QA basis.

QI would allow deer veterinarians, who currently may not possess a full quantum of deer veterinary skills to upskill. The opportunity of providing a frame work for veterinarian upskilling must be an huge opportunity. (It would be perceived that the manual to be provided for the QA Programme would not be a document of knowledge but a list of professional outcomes as listed above, and sources of inputs).

The issues raised above in the profession's perspective would also obviously be of relevance at the individual veterinarians level.

8. Where to from now ?

This discussion paper outlines a number of issues veterinarians need to consider when deciding whether QA and QI should be adopted for the profession and in what form they should be.

This programme will only be introduced if deer veterinarians support the concept. Should the members of the deer profession vote to adopt a quality programme, then the profession must single-mindedly work through the typically difficult introductory period, support the development of the programme and only then expect and enjoy the benefits.

Should the profession vote against following a quality programme then it would be prudent to keep the issue tabled for on going consideration.