Suitably qualified persons

**KEY POINTS**
- Suitability qualified persons (SQPs) can prescribe and supply ‘prescription-only medicines – veterinarian, pharmacist, SQP’ (POM-VPS) and ‘non-food animal medicines – veterinarian, pharmacist, SQP’ (NFA-VPS) medicines
- SQPs must operate from an approved premises
- SQPs cannot diagnose disease
- SQPs must assess owners’ competence and advise on warnings and safe administration
- SQPs cannot prescribe POM-V medicines or use the cascade

**Definitions**

‘Suitably qualified person (SQP)’ is a phrase used in the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMR) to describe a person who is permitted to prescribe and supply veterinary medicines classified as POM-VPS or NFA-VPS in the UK. Most of the medicines in the ‘veterinarian, pharmacist, SQP’ (VPS) categories have preventive uses (e.g. external and internal antiparasitic medicines, farm animal vaccines and nutritional supplements). SQPs may, like anyone else, supply medicines classified AVM-GSL and those sold under the exemption for small pet animals (ESPA).

Over 6000 SQPs are registered with the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA). SQPs have to renew their registration with AMTRA each year and pay an annual fee. AMTRA monitors continuing professional development (CPD) and deals with complaints about breaches of professional standards.

SQPs must comply with a Code of Practice issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Secretary of State through the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and distributed by AMTRA. SQPs must supply only from authorized premises and only from within the animal group categories for which they are trained and registered.

SQP should not be confused with the broader term Registered Qualified Person (RQP) which encompasses:
- Veterinary surgeons registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)
- Pharmacists registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (in Great Britain) or the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland
- SQPs registered with AMTRA.

The regulations also define other types of ‘qualified person’, including Manufacturing Qualified Persons and Pharmacovigilance Qualified Persons.

The category of an SQP is indicated by a character or characters within their SQP number. The most common are:
- R-SQP – qualified to supply for all species groups
- E-SQP – equine and companion animal only
- C-SQP – companion animal only.

There are other potential species combinations with their own prefixes. More information can be found on the AMTRA website.

**Premises**

SQPs must operate from approved premises, which may be a registered veterinary practice or a registered pharmacy, where no further registration is needed, or an SQP retailer’s premises registered with the VMD. The VMD will inspect premises and register them annually. For more information, see the VMD’s Retail of veterinary medicines guidance page (formerly VMGN No 3 – Guidance for Retailers).

See also Premises licensing and inspections.

**Legal duties**

When prescribing a POM-VPS product, the SQP must always take account of:
- Circumstances of the holding and the animals being treated
- Available authorized veterinary medicines
- The need for responsible use of medicines and the requirement to prescribe the minimum amount of product necessary for the treatment
- Requirement for the person receiving the product to use it for an authorized use
- The abilities and competence of the person who will administer the product
- Any available Animal Health Plan.

BSAVA GUIDE TO THE USE OF VETERINARY MEDICINES
Edited by Fred Nind and Pam Mosedale. © BSAVA 2015. Updated April 2018

Delivered by BSAVA to: Guest (guest)
IP:  54.70.40.11
On: Sat, 05 Oct 2019 23:58:37
That prescription may be in writing but usually will be verbal. SQPs need not see the animal and in any case may not diagnose disease.

In supplying a POM-VPS or NFA-VPS product, the SQP must always:

- Be satisfied that the person who will use the product is competent to use it safely
- Advise on warnings or contraindications
- Provide advice on safe administration.

SQPs may not break the immediate packaging of a medicine, so cannot supply a small number of tablets from a tub, but may for instance supply individually wrapped boluses or parts of a blister strip of tablets, provided that all the required written information is supplied to each client, such as by providing a copy of the package insert or summary of product characteristics (SPC).

**Off-label use**

On their own authority, an SQP may only supply medicines and advise on use consistent with the SPC. If a client wishes to use a medicine for a species for which it is not authorized, then an SQP may only supply the medicine in accordance with a prescription from a veterinary surgeon under the prescribing cascade.

See also Prescribing cascade.

**Examinations and categories**

The Code of Practice for SQPs requires that all SQP qualifications be at Higher Education Level 4 (equivalent to first-year degree level) and outlines the required syllabus.

Candidates are assessed by examinations set and marked by Harper Adams University taking place at locations throughout the country. All SQPs have to pass an AMTRA viva and relevant written examinations. Additional species modules may be added at future dates, extending the range of medicine groups available to the SQP.

The most common route to SQP qualification is to pass a base examination, which covers legislation, anatomy, physiology and disease challenges. In addition to the base module, there are species modules: farm animal, equine, avian and companion animal. SQPs have to pass relevant species group module(s) as well as the base and oral examinations. Thus, SQPs can combine species modules to create the qualification relevant to them and their business.

Alternatively, qualified veterinary nurses may become SQPs via an accreditation of prior learning (APL) and a shorter written examination, which concentrates on legislation and application of the knowledge and understanding they are already likely to have, in order to become a C-SQP. They can build on this by adding the farm animal, avian or equine modules.

Some veterinary pharmacy qualifications are also recognised by AMTRA as the academic basis for SQP registration.

**Continuing professional development**

Once qualified, an SQP must show they are keeping up to date. There is a 2-yearly requirement for CPD points. These can be gained from accredited meetings and webinars, accredited distance learning, and private study. CPD is compulsory; those not gaining enough CPD points cannot continue as SQPs without passing fresh examinations. More information can be found on AMTRA’s CPD webpage (38).

**SQPs in veterinary practice**

An SQP working in veterinary practice has the legal right to prescribe and supply POM-VPS and NFA-VPS medicines without recourse to the veterinary surgeon, and to anyone, not just clients of the practice. Without an SQP, every decision to supply any medicine (other than those on free sale) must be made by a veterinary surgeon on a case-by-case basis, which may pose logistical challenges as well as potentially inhibiting clients and thus compromising animal care.

Being an SQP gives no extra rights in relation to ‘prescription-only medicine – veterinarian’ (POM-V) medicines. The vet must prescribe the product and authorize each transaction individually, but may authorize another person to hand over the product provided the vet is satisfied that the person handing it over is competent to do so. It is not necessary to be an SQP to be regarded as competent.
QUESTIONS

1. Which organization is responsible for registering SQPs?
   a. AMTRA
   b. VMD
   c. NOAH
   d. The Home Office

2. Which categories of medicines can SQPs supply and prescribe?
   a. POM-V; POM-VPS
   b. POM-VPS; NFA-VPS; AVM-GSL
   c. POM-V; NFA-VPS
   d. POM-V; POM-VPS; NFA-VPS; AVM-GSL

3. When supplying a POM-VPS or NFA-VPS medicine, an SQP must:
   a. Be satisfied that the person who will use the product is competent to use it safely
   b. Advise on warnings or contraindications
   c. Provide advice on safe administration
   d. All of the above

4. SQPs working in veterinary practice can:
   a. Prescribe POM-V medicines
   b. Use the prescribing cascade
   c. Prescribe and supply POM-VPS and NFA-VPS medicines without recourse to the vet
   d. Supply all wormers and flea treatments to non-clients

ANSWERS
1 – a; 2 – b; 3 – d; 4 – c