Part I

The Role of the Nurse in the Veterinary Practice
The role of the veterinary nurse has evolved into a regulated profession. A registered veterinary nurse (RVN) is regulated by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA). A solid understanding of this legislation is required in order to ensure that your actions are not only within the law but also in line with the professional code of conduct.

As a consulting nurse it is important to know your own limits, both to be within the law and not to exceed your own personal limitations. Under the VSA only veterinary surgeons are permitted to make a diagnosis. When examining an animal or answering an owner’s questions, you must take care in the area of diagnosis. The veterinary nurse is permitted to inform the owner of the clinical symptoms that the animal is displaying, such as weight loss, increased thirst, tachypnoea, anaemia. You can discuss conditions that display these symptoms, and give guidance on what steps the owner needs to take next – for example, consultation with a veterinary surgeon. If it is likely that the animal will require further investigations, such as blood tests, the owner should be advised that this may occur in the veterinary consultation and the owner can prepare the animal if required; for example, they can pre-starve the patient rather than having to come back for an additional appointment.

Suitably qualified persons

It is useful for veterinary nurses to have the ‘suitably qualified person’ (SQP) qualification in order to prescribe and dispense appropriate medicines for animals. The SQP qualification is regulated by the Animal Medicines Training Regulatory Authority (AMTRA) and requires annual retention fees alongside continued professional development that has been approved by AMTRA. Many anthelmintics are prescription-only medicine (POM-VPS) or in the non-food animal (NFA-VPS) category, which means they can be prescribed by a veterinary nurse with the appropriate SQP qualification. It is necessary for a nurse who conducts clinics to
hold this qualification, so that appropriate anthelmintics can be given without needing to consult the veterinary surgeon (Figure 1.1).

One of the roles of the veterinary nurse is to ensure compliance with recommendations given by the veterinary surgeon. Sometimes this can refer to medications, and you should confirm with the owner that they are able to administer the medications that have been prescribed. In some cases a different format of medication, such as liquid instead of tablets, can be helpful. These cases require not just an initialled change to the prescription, but a separate prescription that must be written by the veterinary surgeon.

When animals are presented to the veterinary nurse for a repeat of injectable medications a veterinary surgeon stills needs to be present in the building as you are administering the medication under veterinary direction. The veterinary surgeon should be in a position to intervene if required, even after they have prescribed the medication.

As an RVN is it vital to have personal indemnity insurance. RVNs are responsible for their own actions, and this includes any work undertaken within a consultation or clinic. Indemnity insurance for RVNs can be included under the veterinary practice’s insurance policy for all staff, or as a personal policy for those who are self-employed. Self-employed locum nurses have to ensure that they are adequately insured.

During a consultation, the person conducting the consultation is responsible for the health and safety of all the people in the room; this includes the client. This means that if the client is hurt, even if by their own pet, the practice is responsible. Any injuries, such as bites or scratches, should be entered into the practice’s Accident Book. It is therefore prudent to ask a colleague to restrain any animals that are not being adequately cooperative. If children are being unruly, you are within your rights to request the parent/guardian to ask their children to behave. If con-
consultations are going to be lengthy, activities to keep children occupied can be a useful distraction. Pictures to colour in, or a pretend ‘vet kit’ with a stuffed toy, can be a great hit with younger children (Figure 1.2). The pictures that they draw or colour can be put up on the wall or notice board.

Figure 1.2  Entertainment for children can prove to be a useful distraction during lengthy consultations.