

BVA guidance for vets discussing Artificial Intelligence (AI) with clients

With clients increasingly turning to AI tools for advice on managing their pets, horses and production animals, being able to confidently engage with these technologies is important for vets. As AI becomes more advanced, and more AI tools are provided direct to animal owners, clients may place even greater trust in its outputs, so you need to be confident in addressing this.

Vets are no strangers to discussions with clients who challenge their decisions using “Dr Google”. Most of those same experiences can be applied to conversations with clients who place their faith in Artificial Intelligence. Whilst the internet and now AI can be helpful in educating and supporting clients it can also cause confusion and misunderstanding when clients are not supported in interpreting the information provided.

The following points are intended to guide you in conversations when faced with clients who have used AI to come to a decision on their pet's health or welfare.

1. Be Clear and Confident

When clients present an AI output as part of discussing their animals care, it is useful to understand how that tool works, and how the output is generated.

The first step should be familiarising yourself with definitions and explanations of AI and the various technologies currently available. Key definitions can be found [here](#). It is useful to ask the client what AI technology they used and if they could share the output with you.

The ones you are most likely to come across in practice are:

Large Language Models

- **Definition:** A large language model is an AI trained on lots of text that can understand and generate language.
- **Examples:** [ChatGPT](#), [Claude](#), [Gemini](#) and [Grok](#).
- **Uses:** Inputting pet's symptoms and asking for a diagnosis. Asking for suggestions on ways to treat or manage a diagnosis.

Computer Vision

- **Definition:** When a computer processes visual information (from cameras, photos, videos) and interprets that information.
- **Examples:** Dental analysis apps, cow movement trackers, equine gait analysis
- **Uses:** To identify patterns in animal behaviour or variations away from normal appearance or behaviour.

Machine Learning

- **Definition:** Machine learning is when a computer learns from data to make predictions, instead of being told exactly what to do.
- **Examples:** Wearable motion trackers, gait analysis tools.
- **Uses:** Health monitoring wearables producing health insights.

2. Validate the client's effort

Clients using tools before seeking vet advice doesn't normally represent distrust in the vet. Whether the output is right or wrong, it is important to validate the client taking steps to look after or inform themselves about their animal's health and welfare. No one likes to feel judged or embarrassed.

3. Discuss the result with the client

If the output is incorrect, constructively exploring why this is and explaining your rationale can help to build trust and understanding with clients. Try to avoid making the client feel “wrong” while still giving them accurate information. It is useful to understand how LLM’s in particular can be wrong.

- **Confidently wrong** - LLMs predict language and can present incorrect answers as fact.
- **Hallucinations** – LLMs can make up results to fill gaps, the model is optimising for coherence, not accuracy.
- **Training data limitations** – The model is only as good as the data it is trained on, for lesser-known breeds or conditions the dataset is significantly smaller making it harder to draw accurate conclusions. The data used to train public models is not curated, meaning its training will include outdated and false information.
- **Unaware of context** – Unless told LLM’s can’t consider factors like geographic location, patient temperament, client means and other factors that vets use to make care decisions.

Even if the output is correct, it is important to explain that basing any treatment decisions on the output is not recommended. AI tools are not able to make a veterinary diagnosis, as vets we can integrate this information into providing the best care for our patients, bringing in context that AI tools cannot.

4. Redirect the conversation toward evidence-based care

Once you and the client have come to an understanding about the AI output that has led to this conversation, it is important to bring it back to your clinical knowledge to address whatever the issue might be.

5. Provide trusted sources for future reading

Clients will continue using Artificial Intelligence. As a vet you should guide your clients toward reliable sites instead of discouraging the use of these technologies. The key is to keep the client coming to you to discuss their concerns rather than driving them away.

- RCVS or BVA recommended pages
- The practice’s own website
- Veterinary charity websites
- Breed-specific health organisations

6. Stay informed

AI will continue to develop. It is a far more powerful and evolving tool than online search engines so the challenge to stay informed and on top of these technologies is much greater. This is especially true as AI companies start to market their products directly to clients without the vet involved.

This does not mean you need to become an AI tech expert but you should have an appreciation for what is out there and how these technologies are being used by your clients. The profession must continue to be a trusted and respected voice on animal health and welfare.