College of Veterinarians of British Columbia



Anti-neoplastic Drugs: Staff and Client Safety

Recently Worksafe BC approached the CVBC to discuss a recent thesis of a student in UBC's Occupational Hygiene Master's program. Surveys taken as part of the thesis indicated that of veterinary facilities administering anti-neoplastic drugs, "Sixty-eight percent (13/19) of respondents who administered antineoplastic drugs never received any formal safe handling training while 74% (14/19) of practices reported not following any specific guidelines on antineoplastic drug handling." Further sampling at primary care facilities showed presence of the drugs in parts of the facility far removed from the location of drug administration. This was not the case in tertiary care level referral facilities. These statistics and sampling outcomes raise concerns that staff are unknowingly being exposed to drugs that could have negative impacts on their health.

WorkSafe BC has kindly provided the CVBC with an information sheet that is included here to help facilities consider where they can improve on their protocols for using these drugs to ensure their employees remain safe from effects of these powerful drugs.

Reflecting on my time in practice treating hyperthyroid cats with radioiodine; we had strict regulations to protect ourselves and clients. We housed the cats to collect their waste and then had homecare for the clients. Registrants must also consider protection of their clients when using chemo drugs and must consider what is the excretion route of the drugs they are using. How long are the drugs present in the patient's bodily excretions? Are they warning clients of the risks and providing homecare to them that explains how to handle their pets and their waste while they may be excreting the drugs?

The CVBC accreditation standards do not specifically mention anti-neoplastic drugs, however, Schedule D, Standard 78 states: "The facility must be capable of ensuring that all drugs are prepared, maintained, dispensed or administered, destroyed/disposed of in accordance with patient, staff and public safety."

CVBC inspectors may ask about facility protocols for handling anti-neoplastic drugs and client homecare. If found lacking, they may list them as a deficiency. As registrants, we must ensure our staff and the client's safety is not outweighed by our desire to help our patients.

