

# Survey: Documenting analgesic use in small animal practice

## A survey of analgesic drugs and techniques used in small animal practice in the Republic of Ireland



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The ability to assess pain and treat it effectively are fundamental to the work of veterinarians and nurses in clinical practice. Effective pain management safeguards animal welfare<sup>1</sup> and meets the expectations of pet owners.<sup>2</sup>

The numbers of veterinarians registered in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) has increased in recent years and surpassed a total of 3,250 in 2022.<sup>3</sup> An increasing number of registrants come from countries other than the ROI. With the differing backgrounds of newly registered veterinarians and the growth in small animal referral practice within the ROI it is important to document the attitudes of veterinarians to pain assessment and pain management now.

### BACKGROUND STUDIES

Earlier surveys by veterinarians in the UK<sup>4,5</sup>; Canada<sup>6,7</sup>; South Africa<sup>8,9</sup>; Brazil<sup>10</sup>; Switzerland<sup>11</sup> and Australia and New Zealand<sup>12</sup> have reported the use of analgesic drugs by clinicians in those countries. A follow-up study by Farnworth et al.<sup>13</sup> surveyed the prescription of analgesics during feline neuter surgery in Australia, New Zealand and the UK. Their results suggested that the proportion of analgesia prescribers had increased from previous reports. This increase was attributed to a greater awareness of animal pain and a greater knowledge of how to treat pain, increased availability of licensed analgesic drugs for use in small animals and increased access to postgraduate educational material. All these factors may have increased the numbers of analgesia prescribers. Therefore, it may be

hypothesised that animal care is improved by recording and documenting current knowledge in this field and using the data to inform continuing education of veterinarians and nurses.



**Epidural anaesthesia performed on a dog.**

### STUDY AIMS AND DESIGN

The aim of this study is to document the use of analgesic drugs by veterinarians in small animal practice in the ROI. The survey will consist of both an online questionnaire using Google forms, or a paper questionnaire that can be returned by mail in a prepaid envelope to UCD. The survey will be divided into several parts, and it will take approximately 10 to 20 minutes to complete. The first part will determine demographic

data about the participants. Subsequent parts will determine the analgesics available in individual practices; assess the use of the different analgesic drugs and techniques and document the methods of pain assessment in dogs and cats. The survey will also seek details of the pain assessment tools used by practitioners. The final part will request information about the type of continuing education practitioners have completed and how they would like to further their knowledge of analgesic drugs and the use thereof in the future.

The questionnaire will be available for a three-month period during the summer of 2023. Once the questionnaire has closed, the data will be collated and analysed with a view to publicising the results within the following year. It is the intention to publish the data in the Irish Veterinary Journal which is accessible to everyone with internet access.

The survey will be conducted anonymously. The answers will be handled with confidentiality according to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). It is entirely voluntary to participate. Ethical approval will be sought, or an exemption obtained if appropriate.

### OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

The purpose of this article is to publicise details of the study and thereby to encourage as many veterinarians as possible in small animal or mixed practice in the ROI to participate. The information obtained will provide insights into the current practice of pain assessment and management and it will be used to guide the provision of postgraduate training for veterinarians and nurses in the future. The data collected will form a basis for follow-up surveys in the future. It is hoped that companion animal welfare will be enhanced by an increased awareness of and greater provision of analgesia.

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