



National Audit for Small Animal Neutering

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Welcome to the quality improvement box set by RCVS Knowledge, a series of webinars, podcasts, and video interviews for practices and practitioners.

Pam Mosedale

Hi everyone. Today, I'm going to talk to Amelia Poole. Amelia is an RVN, who's worked in practice since 2008 and she's currently Quality Improvement Project Manager at RCVS Knowledge, and she's responsible for benchmarking and audits and the NASAN at RCVS Knowledge. So Amelia, what is this NASAN?

Amelia Poole

So the NASAN, obviously isn't its real name. It stands for the National Audit for Small Animal Neutering, but NASAN is just a lot easier to say, on a daily basis, so the NASAN does what it says on the tin really. It's a national audit, so it's an audit that anyone can do in practice and it's an audit of neutering post-op outcomes. So when you do your neutering in practice, and you see them back for their post-op check, they will either be absolutely fine or they will have something that needs medication, or they might need some surgery to sort out their complication, and all of that is put onto a big audit spreadsheet. That data is submitted from practices all over the UK and all of the data together gets analyzed to create national benchmark figures for neutering complications

Pam Mosedale

Sounds amazing. And something that, you know, nearly every practice could get involved in. That's the exciting thing, isn't it? Why do you think practices should be interested in getting involved?

Amelia Poole

It gives you so much data just looking at your neutering. I mean, neutering is something that every single practice does. I mean, I'm sure you have lost count on how many cat spays or dog castrates, you know everyone does it all over the place. It happens everywhere, but we still kind of get complications for something that's so routine. And, so essentially I'm not saying it's simple because you do get horrible neutering procedures, um, but essentially for something that you do every day, we still get quite a lot of complications. And I think auditing that data and the neutering complications that you have, it's such a, it's just such an easy thing to do. We provide a spreadsheet where all you have to do is copy and paste, your data into the spreadsheet and the information that you

get from it, it's just loads. It will tell you the percentages of your outcomes. So kind of how many cats you have that have come back with complications or how many cats you have that don't come back at all, because they run off. It would tell you what your complication rate is for your bitch spay versus your dog castrates, or even if you do perform them in practice, your traditional bitch spay versus your laparoscopic bitch spay. And it gives you really accurate numbers that you can say to your clients, because we all know the clients that come in and they are obviously really nervous about getting their cockerpoo spayed, and you can really say to them with accuracy that, you know, you audit your complications and the chance of little Fluffy coming back with a complication is this percentage. So I think it's really easy. You get loads of data back and yeah, it's a really good way just to get you started on kind of the audit, the audit journey. It's a great start for anyone to do

Pam Mosedale

That sounds great. And of course clinical audit is now a requirement in practice standard scheme at general practice. So if practices are participating in this benchmarking exercise that could count for the audit requirement there couldn't it.

Amelia Poole

Oh, absolutely. So anyone that completes an audit with our NASAN spreadsheet and submits data into us, as a kind of thank you, they get a certificate just saying that they have submitted data, the months that they have submitted data for, and that they've contributed to national benchmarking and that can be used to show to the PSS assessor, as proof of your contribution to clinical audit and benchmarking.

Pam Mosedale

Excellent. But I suppose if, um, and that's great and will be really useful for a lot of practices, I think, and it's a great place to start and a great place for practices to start with quality improvement generally, because obviously when they get these results, if they're not happy with some of them, then their whole point here is, is to improve. Isn't it. If their results are not up to the benchmark, what would you expect practices to be doing if their results, um, were significantly different from the benchmark?

Amelia Poole

I think this is where auditing can get, um, a little bit out of control because then you think of so many things that you could potentially change. But I would say if you get your results and they are not as good as the benchmark, I would have a look at your numbers. So you have got to remember that our benchmark figures are really good, but they are based on a huge amount of neuters done across the country. And if you're only a very small practice that does, you know, one spay a week or, or, you know, a castrate every now and then, then if you try and compare those numbers, they're not comparable. So first of all, kind of have a look at the amount of neuters that you're doing and see if it is comparable. If you're not really sure, then maybe have a chat to other practices, see if you can, you know, have a look, see what their data is just to see if it's more comparable. If you're starting to look kind of at your own processes, then I think the easiest thing to do is have a chat with your team, sit down and perhaps just talk about the process, basically the patient journey of the neuter, see what they go through, see what your current kind of guidelines and protocols are in place, because it might be something really simple. I know we have a great case example by Louise Northway who noticed that her castrate complications were really way worse than the benchmark, and when she had a chat with her team about it, it was just that their team were sending dog castrates home with Buster collars.

Amelia Poole

And because the owners didn't like Buster collars on, you know, big rowdy dogs, they weren't then making the dogs wear Buster collars. So obviously they were coming back with post-op infections where the dogs have been licking. So all they did was have a chat and change to the kind of surgical suit onesies that you get and they managed to reduce their complications massively. So it might be a case of something kind of really, really simple like that. It might be that there's been an update in infection control protocols, and surgical scrub that you just kind of haven't caught up on or, or have completely missed. And that if you kind of start that new technique, then your complication rate might come down. It might be that you look at different cases on kind of a one-to-one basis. And it might be that, you know, you look at a particular castrate and you think, oh, you know what? That was an incredibly bouncy dog, really uncontrollable. We kind of expected that to come back with a complication, but we did everything we could otherwise, then at least you're looking at what you do and kind of analyzing yourself. So if you do make changes in practice,, great. The best thing is to make changes, um, and just keep repeating the audit just so you can see whether you're improving or not, and if the next time you don't meet the national benchmark, but you've improved on your own figures, then that's brilliant.

Pam Mosedale

And that's a really important point that you raised then about discussing this with the team, I think. I think it's really important, isn't it? The team know that this is a team effort. It's not, we are not looking for individuals who might have issues, individual vets or individual nurses.

Amelia Poole

No, not at all. And especially the kind of front of house team as well because, the vet or the nurse might do the patient discharge and then the clients might go out and say to the receptionist, like, oh, you know, I don't want this Buster collar actually, can you take it back? Um, and they might just sort the refund out without even really relating it to the complications. So I think that's really important to kind of have the same messages across, across the board all over the place.

Pam Mosedale

Yeah, definitely and again, the front of house team can reassure clients who are nervous, because they might admit that to them where they wouldn't say it to the vets sometimes.

Amelia Poole

Yeah, exactly. And I dunno, I just think measuring a how you're doing and sharing that with your team and actually working together to make improvements, um, just makes it a bit of a nicer, nicer workplace, really bonds you as a team and gives you something to kind of overall work towards and strive for.

Pam Mosedale

Absolutely. From the results you've had so far from the audit, are there any sort of interesting trends you can point out to us?

Amelia Poole

Um, there is, yes. I I've probably spent the last two weeks non-stop just looking at these results. So we now have results for 45,000 patients, that have been neutered in the UK. And that data's been donated and submitted by 213 different practices. So I'm pretty pleased with that. I think that's really, that's

really good. Um, so we measure the post-op complications in a few different ways, one of the first kind of selections that you can pick is "lost a follow up", which is all of those patients that you don't know how they've done because they just never come back. Perhaps not surprisingly cats make up 70% of all of those patients that just never come back. Which kind of didn't shock me at all, but I don't think I realized it's as high as 70%. But yeah, it doesn't really surprise me at all because some people just don't have cats, especially like cat castrates back for post-op checks if they seem okay. Talking of cat castrates, they're also the lowest complication rate, out of kind of all of the neuters that we look at. So we look at cat neuters, dog neuters, and rabbit neuters as well. So cat castrates came out as the lowest, however, something that, one of the stats that really quite surprised me is that on average, 17% of all neutering procedures will end up with a complication, whether that's mild that doesn't need any medication, or even whether that's a fatality. So I thought that was quite a big chunk of neutering considering, well, considering it's a, it's a routine procedure, all of these patients are healthy ASA score one. Um, yeah, that was probably, um, the most, the most shocking for me.

Pam Mosedale

What about the rabbits? Did you find anything interesting about them?

Amelia Poole

So the rabbits, I kind of like, I really loved looking at that data, because I guess you're always, you're always told, in veterinary training and you tell owners that, you know, there is a high amount of complications with rabbits in their anesthetics. But actually 82% of all the rabbits that we had data in for were absolutely fine, had no complications at all. Um, and what really surprised me is the complication rate was much higher in rabbit castrates than it was in rabbit spays, which is completely backwards to what I thought it would be

Pam Mosedale

And the opposite way around too in dogs and cats, I presume.

Amelia Poole

Yep. So dog spays and cats spays had a much higher complication rate, than the dog castrates and cat castrates. But with the rabbits, it completely flipped around. I've got no idea why perhaps it's, you know, just because we don't really have a lot of data on rabbits yet, we've got data for about five to 600 rabbits. But the data we've got at the moment, it's quite a big contrast. The complication rate for rabbit castrates is 20% and the complication rate for rabbit spay is only 12%.

Pam Mosedale

That's really, and that really demonstrates why it's so important to collect this data. Doesn't it? Because we, we all make assumptions. We all think we know what's going on with, with these very routine procedures, but maybe it's not how we imagine it. And that could be, if that continues like that, that could be some interesting project for someone to have a look at why, why the kind of complication rates are that way around in rabbits.

Amelia Poole

And I think as a rabbit owner, if I was bringing in my rabbit for a spay and I was told that actually, you know, the complication rates only 12% as a rabbit owner, I'd think that's all right, because you are again, you're kind of told that most rabbits die under anesthetic and there's no actual real data for that owner

to make a decision on. So I think collecting the data can actually help owners make more of an informed decision about treatment and neutering and actually gives you more of an informed consent from the owner as well.

Pam Mosedale

Definitely. I think it's been very helpful, the informed consent and just demonstrates to owners that the practice cares about these things, and does monitor what they do and try to improve what they do. So how do practices actually get involved then if, hopefully they're going to be motivated having listened to this, what do they do next? Those practices aren't amongst the 200 plus that are doing it. What do they do next?

Amelia Poole

So, it's, it's honestly really, really simple. We have a website called vetAUDIT, and you can go onto the vetAUDIT website and download the spreadsheets. So you just download a normal Excel spreadsheet. Don't worry if you've not used Excel or spreadsheets before you, you can't, you can't muck it up really. You can copy and paste or you can type in your patient kind of outcomes one by one, depending on whether you can download the data from your practice management system or not. And then you just put it into the spreadsheet and the rest of it, does the rest for you. Then all you have to do is email the spreadsheet to us to submit the data, and then you'll get your certificate. And that's it, that's the first round of auditing and submitting to benchmark done.

Pam Mosedale

That sounds really nice and simple. So no reason really for practices not to go for it. And it's really important, isn't it to get as much data and get as many practices involved as possible because, you know, the more practices we have involved, the more relevant the data becomes, doesn't it?

Amelia Poole

Oh, absolutely. Like we, we started collecting data for the laparoscopic bitch spays, a little bit frustratingly in November, 2019. So, obviously we don't have a lot of data for laparoscopic bitch spays, but I know practices out there are doing it, but we only have data for about 200 laparoscopic procedures. I think the more data we get, it would be really interesting to see the difference between the outcome rate for the laparoscopic bitch spays and the traditional bitch spays. But especially with the rabbits, the data that we have now is great, but the more data we get just means that it's, it's more, Ugh, the words completely escaped me. Um, just...

Pam Mosedale

More relevant, more applicable.

Amelia Poole

Yeah, yeah. More accurate. So yeah, the more data we get the, the more relevant these benchmarks are. And you know that when you're comparing your numbers against them, you can, you can just say that for sure, that complication rate is between 70 and 80%.

Pam Mosedale

Even the practices that get great results and that they're better than your benchmark, what should they be doing?

Amelia Poole

Submit your benchmark results, let us know what you're doing so that we can share it with the profession. Um, because obviously you're doing something amazingly right, and why would you not want to share what you're doing with the rest of the profession so that they can reduce their complication rates. But also don't, don't stop auditing because you never know what's going to happen. Um, you might, you don't want to get complacent. You don't want to think, oh yeah, we know what we're doing, it's all fine, it's great. And then not realize that actually in that time where you've been complacent, your complication rates have really gone through the roof and you've missed something, but because it's been so long, you have to go way back and think of everything that you're doing. So regular auditing just allows you to keep on top of it. And like I said, it might be something that you audit every month and think, oh, complication rate went a bit high, but that was a load of bouncy dogs. And, you know, that was a dog that just, we knew that was going to happen. So it might be that you don't change anything from your audits on a month to month basis, but at least that's in your mind, and you're monitoring them and you're keeping an eye on them just to make sure that that complication rate doesn't creep up.

Pam Mosedale

So takes some reassurance from it, but carry on with it basically.

Amelia Poole

Yeah, absolutely. And especially just, just to share what you're doing, because you might have the kind of magic antidote that every practice in the in the UK should be doing, you just don't know it yet.

Pam Mosedale

Absolutely. So, so I think that's a really important thing, isn't it? That we really want as many practices as possible to join in with this.

Amelia Poole

Yeah, absolutely. And you might be sitting there thinking, well, you know, my other practice does that, or you might be part of a corporate that, that takes that data for you, but still submitting it to us means that everybody gets access to these benchmark figures. And these benchmark figures are across all practices, so they're not from a particular group or from a particular part of the country. We want it to be as widespread as possible to give the most accurate UK figure that we can.

Pam Mosedale

So it's something we can do for the whole profession to help everybody, and for animal welfare too.

Amelia Poole

Absolutely. Yeah. I mean, neutering is just really the start of it. If we get neutering absolutely spot on right, then we can move on to our other procedures as well, you know, take the learnings that we've got from the neutering and apply them to other procedures. I mean, it's a little bit harder to benchmark other procedures because there's so many variables that happen during an ex-lap and things like that,

whereas neutering's are generally mostly done the same-ish way. So we can get accurate figures for that. And, you know, once, once we're spot on with that, we can move onto other procedures to,

Pam Mosedale

We're very lucky aren't we to have something that's so comparable across the whole small animal side of the profession.

Amelia Poole

And I think just also lucky that all of this is free. You don't, you don't have to log onto somewhere or beg someone for a login or get a paywall to access all this data. It's, it's just sitting there for free and you can just download it, print it, access it, it share it with your team. It's just, it's all there just waiting for people to use it.

Pam Mosedale

And there's a video isn't there to show people how to do it too.

Amelia Poole

Yes. There is a video. We've just recorded a video. So if you're still sitting here thinking, oh, I'm really not comfortable with Excel spreadsheets or any sort of spreadsheets, because let's be honest who was ever taught how to use one of those, then I've done a video, which explains exactly how you put data in, a little bit on how you read that data. But currently I'm also putting together a bit more of a fun thing to read about data, just to explain exactly what you do when you get your results, how you compare them properly against the benchmark and then also ideas to get you started on. Because sometimes when you get your results, you've just got a complete mind blank of how you can improve and what to even look at next, so I'm hoping just to have a little prompt of what you can do, and what your next steps should be after you get your data and submit it.

Pam Mosedale

Thanks Amelia. I think that's really inspiring for vets, nurses, practice teams to get involved. So if they go to the RCVS Knowledge website, they can find all this information.

Amelia Poole

Absolutely. It will be on the clinical audit page or the benchmarking page, and there will be a link straight through to everything that you need.

Pam Mosedale

And in the QI box set.

Amelia Poole

Absolutely. Yep. Always in the QI box set.

Pam Mosedale

Okay. Thanks Amelia.

Amelia Poole

No problems. Thank you.

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