

B-PAP module: some tips on writing your case reports

General aspects:

- Allow the reader to follow your logic and ‘show-off’ your knowledge and thinking. We cannot second guess why you have dismissed a differential diagnosis, for example, if you don’t tell us. You are very familiar with the case, but the reader only gets in information what you present.
- A case (herd / flock health or individual) with several nuances is often easier to write on and demonstrate your knowledge than a simple, straight-forward case. For the therapeutics case report though, a simple case can work very well (e.g. you may be surprised how many aspects filter into a surgical castration).
- Any case report should be written in such a way that if it ended up in a court of law, it would be so robust and well written that it could be used as evidence. To that end:
 - Record all persons present at time of herd / flock health visit, or who asked you to attend animals.
 - Give sufficient background regarding the enterprise that the subsequent report makes sense. This includes reports on medical / surgical / individual cases.
For flock / herd health reports, this point is also useful to (a) show farm that you did get the right end of the stick and are not basing your recommendations on a misunderstood perception of their management; (b) provide introductory background should a colleague become involved with the farm / take over its care.
 - Proof-read for spelling & grammar.
Please note: we may well make spelling mistakes in our feedback to you, and this feedback may, of course, flag up shortcomings in your spelling and grammar. Please appreciate the difference between a formally submitted piece of work, versus feedback written as we work through reports (and without spell-checking function).
- State the time of year. This helps reader to evaluate your list of differential diagnoses. Does not have to be the exact date, but month +/- early/mid/late.
- For the purpose of these CertAVP reports, maintain client anonymity. It may be easier to write if you invent a name (for persons +/- farm).
- Even for herd / flock health reports, consider a differential diagnosis list (and why you ruled something in or out). It helps you work through the presenting problem logically.
- Economics: essential for food-production animals, and applies to recommendations as well as treatment of group or individual animal, so include an idea of likely cost and cost-benefit ratio. This does not need to be into last detail. You may be able to give benefit as fully-costed financial figure, but as a minimum you should include an estimate of cost and what it would take to recoup costs (e.g. 10 less cases of lameness based on average cost per case of £x; or likely to have x more productive years after this surgery)
- Units / dose rates: for farm features, work in metric units and avoid ‘mix & match’ (e.g. shed dimension in feet, trough space in centimetres). Industry advice is now typically in metric, i.e. make it easy for your clients to compare advice from different sources. By all means state imperial units additionally in brackets.

For dose rates, it is customary to provide dose rates in mg / kg BW (exception: local infiltration). Reason: allows rapid comparison to reports / studies / toxic range. Do not ask reader to work this out (e.g. by just giving volume, concentration and animal’s weight).

- Recommendations:
 - Be specific, i.e. offer solutions HOW something could be achieved. Just saying ‘you must reduce / increase this, or offer that’ is not enough. Four reasons: (1) because you are paid for to provide consultancy; (2) you are a trusted person; (3) you are a fresh pair of eyes – a lot of clients know something is not right, but have not found a solution or be too close to things to overlook what may be obvious for an outsider; (4) unless you fully think through your advice, you will not gain an insight how likely it is that it will be implemented (which in turn governs what outcome can reasonably be expected in terms of disease control, productivity, welfare improvement etc.)
 - Don’t hide behind generalities: e.g. say exactly when to BCS and what the target would be, instead of just saying that they should BCS throughout the year.
 - Make recommendations stand out (e.g. bullet-point summary)
 - Give them a ranking (i.e. what you feel is most important to implement)

Nutrition report:

- There are many approaches to a nutrition visit and report. However, they should always be systematic and cover all areas (e.g. not just the lactating cows since that is where the problem appears to be).
- Give the details of the diets in a form that allows the reader to see what is believed to be fed (e.g. tabulated). Include an estimate of the energy density (M/D), where applicable.
- Consider actual intakes. Things can look great on paper, but if the animal does not consume it, it is all meaningless.
- Always interpret your findings in totality (e.g. if cows lose 1 BCS score in first 8 weeks post-partum they have a NEB problem even if BOHB are okay).
- Look at the animals – they are always right!

Diagnostics report:

- Make sure your clinical examination is detailed enough to allow reader to follow why you came up with the differential diagnoses that you considered. To this extent, a case where you only have ‘WNL’ and ‘abnormal’ (without further details) in your notes would make a poor choice.
- For vital signs, it is customary to both state actual value, plus either normal range or interpretation of your findings (e.g. ewe had tachycardia with HR of 180 bpm). This allows reader to judge how severe the change from normal was.
- A case with a tentative (rather than a definite) diagnosis is fine. You may wish to include whether and how you may have arrived at a definite diagnosis.

Therapeutics report:

- Withholding periods: this is a must for any case report involving a food producing species, but especially for a report with a therapeutic focus. You may also wish to indicate that you understand the prescription cascade fully, where applicable (e.g. using multiple drugs concurrently, or using off-datasheet).