

# Do nurses need a list of Schedule 3 tasks?

MANY of us have struggled to have a working understanding of what can and cannot be delegated by a vet to a vet nurse.

A survey carried out by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons last year provided confirmation that the Schedule 3 (S3) guidance – the supplement to the Veterinary Surgeons Act – is confusing for veterinary professionals. You can view highlights of the survey results at <https://bit.ly/2zmiWDn>.

The results also showed that both professional groups want to see more delegation of tasks from vets to vet nurses – this would reduce the workload on vets and improve job satisfaction for vet nurses.

There is currently no definitive list of tasks and skills that can be checked against to see which are suitable for vet nurses to perform under S3. Many people have called for such a list to be created. I am not one of them – I believe it should remain up to vets and vet nurses to use their professional judgement to delegate and accept these delegations on a case-by-case basis using the current S3 framework.

However, even I must admit that we do need to start somewhere and I can see the benefits of creating a list of tasks that are clear for both parties, as long as that list doesn't become definitive.

It would provide the basis for a productive conversation around how to use the S3 framework to delegate safely. It could be used as a starting point to optimise team working, but I don't think it should be used as a 'one size fits all' approach to delegation of tasks.

The next question is where would we get such a list? Well, the recently published vet student EMS guide (<https://bit.ly/2NJBZdm>) from the Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) seems to be a good place to start for all of us. It lists jobs or opportunities that vet students can expect to undertake when on placements across different types of practice.

The small animal practice list just also happens to be a list of commonly delegated S3 skills for first-opinion vet nurses. Anecdotal evidence, and also my own experience, confirms that vet nurses often take on the responsibility of teaching and supporting student vets during EMS with these



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tasks. Yet once graduated, ironically, it seems some vets then don't feel able to delegate these same tasks to vet nurses.

While we can't make the decision on what induction agent to use for anaesthesia or interpret bloods, we can put our name to almost every other task listed in the small animal section; for example, take blood/place an intravenous (IV) line, perform urinalysis, administer medication (including IV) and support surgery and anaesthesia. These skills are all within the boundaries of S3 – the details of which can be checked at <https://bit.ly/2IZU4mI>.

Following publication of the survey, there was a positive feeling about vets wanting nurses to do more – yet some conversations online seemed to suggest we needed to change the current S3 legislation. Surely for any future changes to be of benefit we need to build an understanding of the current system? I believe that within the current S3 framework there is room for vet nurses to improve the scope of their skills if delegation is done properly.

Deciding on what to delegate during the working day can be hard, so, again, using the EMS list to help decide who can carry out tasks might be useful. Opportunities for delegation may also be found by reviewing practice standard operating procedures or by reviewing patient care in case meetings.

In time, once we have built a better understanding of the S3 framework, I hope we could move away from needing a list to guide us. I fear that in the future such a list would be limiting and restrict what vet nurses can do, as each practice is unique in the way they need their team to work together to provide high-quality patient care.

The real aim would be to move on to a situation where teams use their professional decision making skills to delegate tasks within the framework based on team needs and skills, and not simply adhere to a list that may limit those delegation opportunities.