

**CENTRE FOR EVIDENCE-BASED  
VETERINARY MEDICINE**  
Putting research into practice

# Veterinary consultations: Test or treat?

Robinson, N.J., Brennan, M.L., Cobb, M. & Dean, R.S.  
Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine and  
Science, The University of Nottingham, UK  
Email: svxnjr@nottingham.ac.uk

**The University of  
Nottingham**  
UNITED KINGDOM • CHINA • MALAYSIA



## Background:

- Most previous veterinary practice-based research has focused primarily on referral practices (Bartlett et al, 2010)
- Veterinary surgeons in first opinion practice deal with many clinical cases every day, utilising this data could provide insight into the veterinary caseload
- In particular, understanding the actions taken during consultations may improve our understanding of the decision-making process.

**Aim:** To determine the common actions taken during first opinion small animal veterinary consultations and the factors which influence these actions.

## Materials and Methods

- Network of eight sentinel practices across the UK were recruited
- Direct observation of consultations for 2 weeks in each practice
- Recorded all problems/health concerns discussed during the consultation
- Recorded all actions taken for all problems and who raised the problem



## Definitions

- **Therapeutic treatment:** Treats or controls the disease or clinical signs
- **Prophylactic treatment:** An attempt to prevent disease
- **Management advice:** Change in husbandry
- **Further investigations:** Diagnostic test following the consultation
- **Refer:** Internally or externally to a specialist or para-professional
- **No Action:** Other than non-specific monitoring, no action was taken

## Results

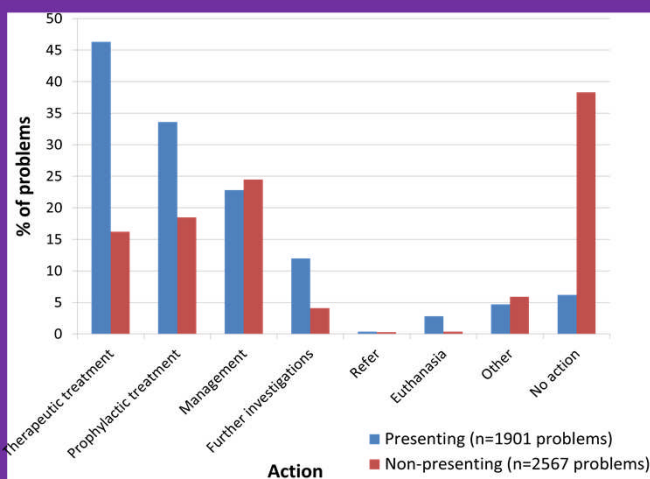
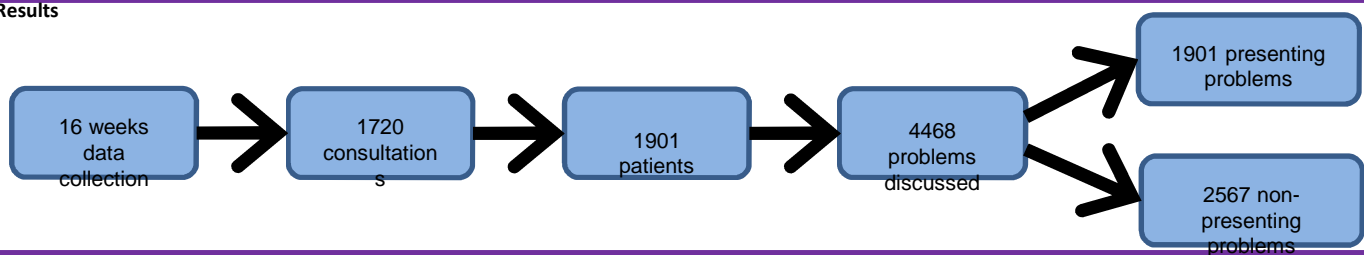


Figure 1. Percentage of presenting/non-presenting problems resulting in each action

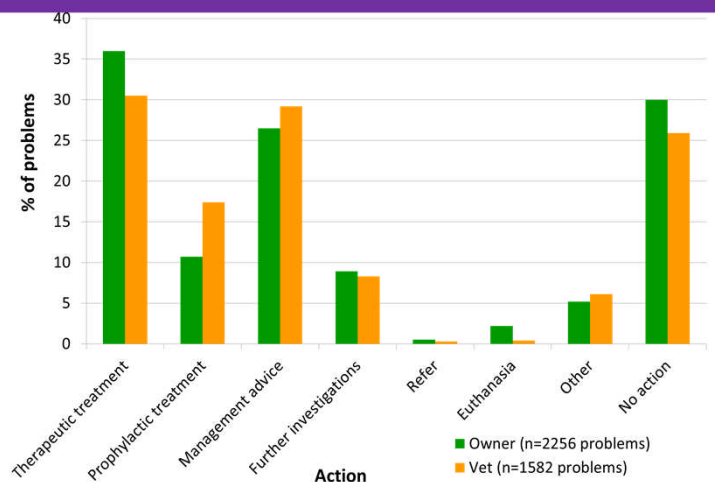


Figure 2. Percentage of problems raised by owner/vet resulting in each action



## Conclusions

Regardless of the nature of the problem, an action is still taken for the majority of problems. However, no action, or 'watchful waiting' can also be a useful action, particularly for those problems which are not the primary reason for presentation. Referral is a rare outcome, therefore research based purely upon these cases is unlikely to be representative of the general population presenting to first opinion practitioners. Further research is needed to identify other factors which affect the action taken, in order to improve our understanding of decision making in veterinary consultations.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the sentinel practices, their clients and patients for their involvement in the study. The Centre for Evidence-based Veterinary Medicine is supported by an unrestricted grant from Novartis Animal Health and The University of Nottingham.

## References

Bartlett, P.C. et al (2010) Disease surveillance and referral bias in the veterinary medical database. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine* 94, 264-271