



Guide to Professional Conduct for Registered Canine Hydrotherapists

December 2022

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Version History

Version	Update	Date
October 2019 v1		October 2019
January 2022 v2	Section 4.1 (m). Incorporating the use of SOAP notes	03 January 2022
Dec 2022 v3	Section 2.0 (i) Incorporating timing for referral requests	06 Dec 2022
	Section 3.2 (g). Incorporating the use of inflatable collars	06 Dec 2022
	Section 7.1 (a) Updating the required CPD hours	06 Dec 2022

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Introduction

A Registered Canine Hydrotherapist (RCH) is a person whose name is entered in the List of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists maintained by the National Association of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists (NARCH).

NARCH and the NARCH logo are registered trade marks of NARCH and may only be used by Registered Canine Hydrotherapists listed with NARCH and with 'Active' membership.

It is the responsibility of a RCH to ensure that they continue to satisfy NARCH requirements for registration and inclusion in the Register and that the information supplied to NARCH is both accurate and truthful.

Failure to maintain an up to date record, or supply information requested, may result in suspension from the List. Further failure to bring a record up to date may result in permanent exclusion from the List or a requirement to begin the registration process again.

The NARCH Guide to Professional Conduct for Registered Canine Hydrotherapists is designed to protect the public interest by ensuring a high level of education and training combined with personal and professional integrity.

How to use this Guide

Whenever the word "must" has been used it indicates a rule that must be complied with.

Where the word "advised" is used it indicates a guideline that it is advisable to follow but professional discretion may be used.

A RCH is expected to observe the provisions of the Guide to Professional Conduct for Registered Canine Hydrotherapists. An electronic copy of the Guide to Professional Conduct is held within the Resource Library on the NARCH website.

If you cannot find the guidance that you need to address a particular situation please contact NARCH for help.

1.0 Rules of Professional Conduct for Registered Canine Hydrotherapists

As a Registered Canine Hydrotherapist you are required to adhere to these ten basic rules:

- 1 Make animal welfare your first consideration for patients committed to your care and ensure that all animals are treated humanely and with respect.
- 2 Maintain and continue to develop professional knowledge and skills. Only practise to the extent that you have established, maintained and developed your ability to work safely and competently.
- 3 Foster and maintain a good relationship with your clients.
- 4 Ensure the confidentiality and security of information acquired in a professional capacity.
- 5 Foster and endeavour to maintain good relationships with your professional colleagues.
- 6 Uphold the good reputation of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists.
- 7 Ensure the integrity of statements signed by a RCH.
- 8 Report to an appropriate authority circumstances which may put patients or others at risk.
- 9 Respond promptly, fully and courteously to complaints and criticism.
- 10 Ensure your RCH record is up to date and that you comply with registration, training and CPD requirements.

2.0 Your responsibilities for the welfare and care of patients

A patient is any animal cared for by a RCH acting in his or her professional capacity.

A RCH must:

- a make animal welfare their primary consideration
- b treat all patients humanely and with respect
- c never cause an animal to suffer
- d never use excessive restraint or excessive discipline
- e provide appropriate hydrotherapy treatment taking into account the reason for referral, medical conditions, age and breed
- f obtain signed permission from the referring veterinary surgeon confirming that it is safe and appropriate for the patient to be treated with hydrotherapy
- g never treat any animal, even if only for recreation/fitness, without a veterinary surgeon's signature
- h obtain clinical history and areas of caution or concern from all veterinary surgeons involved in the patient's care
- i For medical referrals, a clinical history must be obtained every six months, and for fitness clients, every year. A new referral from a veterinarian is also required for any conditions that change or develop during this time
- j obtain clinical history, treatment history and instructions from any veterinary physiotherapist involved in the patient's care
- k obtain details of any other complementary therapists involved in the patient's care
- l not carry out hydrotherapy when the possible benefits may be outweighed by the risk of:
 - i causing harm
 - ii worsening the patient's condition
 - iii causing distress or suffering
- m keep copies of all veterinary referral, clinical history and treatment records for a period of not less than seven years from the patient's last hydrotherapy session
- n fully comply with the Animal Welfare Act
- o fully comply with the Dangerous Dogs Act

A RCH who has concerns about the competence of a colleague or animal welfare within a centre is encouraged to discuss this through the appropriate processes in their place of work.

If the matter cannot be resolved with this initial approach the RCH must communicate their concerns to NARCH.

3.0 Your responsibilities for safe hydrotherapy treatment

3.1 A RCH must on every occasion:

- a consider the patient's medical condition, size/breed, behaviour, the limits of their own hydrotherapy competence and experience and then decide if it is safe to treat the patient
- b consider the patient's medical condition, size/breed, behaviour and the number of trained staff available and decide if it is safe to treat the patient
- c make sure that all relevant veterinary permissions/referrals, clinical history, records and patient information have been obtained before commencing hydrotherapy treatment
- d have suitable emergency procedures in place, including suitable transport to take a patient to a veterinary surgeon in an emergency

3.2 Welfare requirements

- a never use or attach a pole to a patient in a hydrotherapy pool. Any RCH who does this will be subject to investigation and may be permanently excluded from the Register
- b all patients receiving hydrotherapy treatment must be fitted with either a life jacket or correctly fitting harness and, if appropriate, a collar
- c any life jacket/harness used should comply with NARCH standards. Life jackets must wrap around underneath the dog offering maximum support in a neutral spinal position, and provide good buoyancy and comfort for the dog. Equipment used should be a suitable size for the dog being treated and be in good working condition
- d hoists – a hoist may be used to get a dog in/out of the pool, should there be no other suitable method of entry/exit. You must ensure that all staff are trained to use the equipment safely and are aware of the conditions that a hoist is not suitable for. At all times a **minimum** of two RCHs must be present and one must be alongside the patient in the pool at all times. If there is any sign of distress or anxiety the hoist must not be used

A patient should **NEVER** be swum whilst still attached to a hoist **by any means**
- e an appropriate resting point **MUST** be available within the hydrotherapy pool
- f never leave a patient unattended at any time. This means being immediately alongside and in control of the patient. Leaving a patient, for example to answer the telephone or engage in conversation, constitutes gross negligence
- g The use of inflatable collars is prohibited for use in the pool/water treadmill due to the external pressure exerted on the respiratory apparatus/ventral neck and potential hyperextension of the neck

3.3 If the RCH is an employer he/she must:

- a ensure all hydrotherapy staff have received appropriate training for their level of responsibility within the hydrotherapy centre or team
- b ensure members of staff who are operating a water treadmill/UWTM have completed advanced/applied water treadmill training, NARCH have been notified and the RCH has updated their NARCH record
- c ensure constant supervision by a qualified RCH for members of staff who fall in any of the following categories:
 - i) not qualified as a canine hydrotherapist
 - ii) not a RCH
 - iii) a RCH who has not completed advanced/applied training to operate a water treadmill/UWTM (if operating a water treadmill/UWTM)
- d ensure all the hydrotherapy centre staff are trained in the use of disabled patient aids and in the safe handling and transport of patients so that patients can safely be assisted by any member of staff
- e ensure **all** hydrotherapy centre staff are trained in canine/feline first aid and hold a valid first aid certificate. All staff must complete an NARCH approved canine/feline first aid refresher course every 24 months to renew their first aid certification. Failure to update a RCH record before expiry will result in suspension until a valid certificate is provided
- f ensure all hydrotherapy centre staff are trained in the centre emergency procedures and are fully aware of fire exit/meeting points, emergency contacts, etc.

4.0 Your responsibilities to clients

The client is the person who requests hydrotherapy services for the patient – for example the registered owner, the owner's agent, an animal charity, public body or business/company.

4.1 A RCH must:

- a **never suggest a diagnosis to the client – in the UK it is illegal for anyone other than a veterinary surgeon to make a diagnosis**
- b ensure that clear information is provided about the arrangements and facilities available for hydrotherapy treatment
- c ensure that the client understands the hydrotherapy treatment being provided, any possible risks to the patient and has signed the terms and conditions to indicate informed agreement to treatment
- d take all reasonable care in using their professional skills to provide hydrotherapy treatment for patients
- e be satisfied that the person to whom a task is delegated is competent in that task
- f ensure the client is kept informed of patient progress, lack of progress or other issues
- g assist with the client's understanding of any issues relating to the patient's treatment
- h ensure an appropriate number of hydrotherapists are available to assist with any therapy to ensure the patient's well-being, taking into account the patient's size, breed, reason for referral, medical conditions and behaviour
- i ensure other veterinary professionals involved in the patient's care are kept informed of progress, lack of progress or other issues
- j communicate any concerns regarding the patient's health or welfare to the patient's veterinary surgeon(s)
- k if the patient shows signs of deterioration or is failing to make progress refer back to the veterinary surgeon
- l recognise situations where the client should speak to the veterinary surgeon in charge of the patient's case and advise the client to do so
- m maintain factual, consistent and accurate contemporaneous patient care records. The patient progress record should follow the **SOAP (Subjective, Objective, Assessment, Plan)** format, providing clear evidence of the **Subjective** and **Objective** observations made, the treatment delivered including the decisions made, the **Assessment** made, and the **Plan** for ongoing care, including clear identification of whether a dog is receiving hydrotherapy for treatment or purely for fitness goals.
- n keep their skills and knowledge up to date by completing the required number of CPD hours per annum
- o stay within their own areas of training, qualifications and competence

4.2 The professional/client relationship is one of mutual trust and respect under which a RCH must:

- a maintain client confidentiality
- b treat clients with respect and courtesy
- c avoid conflicts of interest
- d not allow themselves to be pressurised by the client into adjusting the treatment plan against the RCH's professional judgement
- e give due consideration to the client's concerns and wishes where these do not conflict with the patient's welfare
- f recognise that clients are entitled to fully itemised accounts and provide an easily accessible and clear fee structure
- g maintain clear, accurate and comprehensive client accounts
- h ensure that insurance claims are completed accurately and in a timely manner
- i never make a false statement on any document or insurance claim
- j provide accurate information when contacted by the client's pet insurance company
- k recognise that the client has freedom of choice
- l ensure that all professional activities are covered by professional indemnity insurance or equivalent arrangements - such cover may be held individually or through an employer

4.3 Insurance requirements

A RCH must be covered:

- a by third-party liability insurance for the protection of the public - this may be held personally or through your employer but it is your responsibility to satisfy both yourself and NARCH that the insurance held is both sufficient and current
- b by professional indemnity insurance for patients in their care – this may be held personally or through your employer but it is **your** responsibility to satisfy both yourself and NARCH that the insurance held is both sufficient and current
- c failure to update a RCH record in respect of insurance will result in **immediate** suspension until valid documentation is provided

5.0 Your responsibilities to the general public

5.1 A RCH must:

- a promote responsible animal ownership
- b at all times be trustworthy and honest and uphold the good reputation of the canine hydrotherapy profession
- c co-operate with colleagues and other health professionals when appropriate
- d use their professional status to provide only factual or evidence based information to the general public about canine hydrotherapy
- e accurately describe the benefits of hydrotherapy and not overstate expected gains from treatment
- f accurately represent their registration with NARCH by using the post-nominal letters RCH. These post nominal letters **must** be removed if no longer listed with NARCH. Failure to do so would constitute misrepresentation.
- g advertise in a professional manner
- h ensure that all publicity, printed matter and website advertising is accurate and true
- i accurately describe the level of training or qualification of both themselves and/or employees
- j make clear whether statements are made in a personal or professional capacity
- k not claim to represent the views of NARCH unless authorised **in writing** to do so
- l not obstruct a client from changing to another hydrotherapy centre
- m provide detailed hydrotherapy treatment notes within seven days of request when a patient moves to a new centre

6.0 Your professional responsibilities to your patients and colleagues

6.1 A RCH must:

- a be present at all times when a patient is being treated and/or cared for. Failure to ensure this basic commitment to patients and the public may result in suspension and possible permanent exclusion from the List of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists
- b ensure that anyone who is not a RCH is closely supervised by a RCH who holds current membership and is not subject to suspension. This includes supervision of students and volunteers. The RCH is the person deemed responsible for care of the patient
- c close supervision means in the same room, actively observing and where necessary instructing/training and offering advice to the member of staff/ student or volunteer. This should be for the entire session in the hydrotherapy pool or water treadmill
- d always liaise with professional colleagues including veterinary surgeons, veterinary physiotherapists and/or hydrotherapy centres who are involved in caring for a patient
- e assist with the provision of all relevant records promptly to colleagues taking over responsibility for a patient
- f accurately represent the level of training, qualification and areas of competence of both themselves and/or employees
- g not speak or write disparagingly about a professional colleague
- h maintain professional courtesy to fellow hydrotherapists and veterinary professionals when posting/commenting on social media including, but not exclusive to, facebook, twitter, Instagram
- i not publish anything on social media which would allow identification of a client, patient or case without permission of the client
- j not obstruct a client from changing to another hydrotherapy centre
- k fully co-operate with NARCH officers when a request is made to carry out an audit
- l fully co-operate with NARCH when a complaint is being investigated

Hydrotherapy centres who fail to ensure guidelines 6.1 a, b and c are complied with will not be listed with NARCH.

7.0 Your responsibilities for hydrotherapy education and continuing professional development

7.1 A RCH must:

- a complete a minimum of 25 hours per annum of NARCH approved CPD. This will be monitored from January to December. Evidence of CPD hours should be uploaded to your record with NARCH. Failure to do so will result in suspension of your registration
- b comply with NARCH education requirements for Registration and inclusion in the list of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists
- c if operating or intending to operate a water treadmill/UWTM NARCH requires disclosure and completion of advanced/applied training specific to this hydrotherapy discipline
- d when returning to practise, or changing career direction, undertake appropriate training to ensure that they are competent to do so

7.2 A RCH should:

- e continue professional education by keeping up to date with general developments in canine/feline hydrotherapy
- f encourage and facilitate participation of employees in CPD programmes

In the first year, that a RCH is registered, their CPD will be calculated pro rata based on the month registration became active.

CPD hours can be completed with attendance courses, online study and self-reflective study or reading.

CPD evidence/certificates must be uploaded to your personal record with NARCH for approval

8.0 Your premises, facilities, maintenance and safety standards

- a hydrotherapy centre premises must be clean and safe for staff, clients and patients
- b hydrotherapy centres must be adequately equipped for the services offered by the centre
- c you should recognise the limitations of both the size and type of hydrotherapy equipment you have available and ensure that you are able to treat a patient safely. You should take into account the patient's reason for referral, medical condition, size/breed and behaviour
- d your facilities should be designed to give the best possible access and service to disabled clients, visitors and patients
- e you should have suitable and safe equipment available to aid clients with disabled pets
- f hydrotherapy equipment should be regularly maintained and records of servicing/repairs should be kept for a minimum of 24 months. This requirement is in addition to any manufacturer's warranty/servicing requirements.
- g you should take advice about the operation of electrical equipment and ensure that you fully comply with electrical safety laws and pay particular attention to the safety requirements for operating equipment in wet or humid conditions
- h a risk assessment of all operations must be carried out annually. Any new activity added during the year should be risk assessed
- i PPE (personal protective equipment) must be 'fit for purpose' and comply with HSE and COSHH requirements. Choice of equipment should be risk assessed with regard to chemicals that are being stored, handled and used by the centre
- j pool chemicals should be stored safely with appropriate signage, to comply with HSE and COSHH regulations

9.0 Pool water treatment and quality

The purpose of pool water treatment is to maintain the water in a safe and pleasant condition for hydrotherapy.

9.1 A RCH must:

- a carry out microbiological testing monthly and retain records for audit/checks
- b maintain water clarity using appropriate equipment, chemicals and routine maintenance schedules
- c keep the water free from harmful bacteria
- d keep the water free from algae growths
- e ensure the water is neither toxic or irritating to patients or staff
- f have access to an industry recognised swimming pool engineer for advice/help with water treatment and equipment problems
- g adhere to NARCH guidelines for safe chemical levels and safe temperature ranges
- h carry out water quality checks at least three times per day when the centre is open and record the date, time, person responsible, test results and action taken
- i keep water treatment records for a minimum of seven years and make records available to NARCH when requested

10.0 Employment and staff matters

10.1 A RCH:

- a who knowingly or carelessly permits anyone to treat a patient without sufficient training or supervision will be subject to disciplinary action which could result in suspension or permanent removal from the List of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists
- b should confirm that an employee is a RCH by checking the NARCH register to ensure the person is listed as a current RCH
- c is responsible for checking annually that an employee who is a RCH has a valid Canine First Aid Certificate, valid insurance cover and has completed the required annual CPD hours and remains listed on the Register
- d employers should encourage and facilitate time for CPD/continuing education for RCH's in their employment
- e employers should, when requested by an RCH who is an employee, provide a copy of public liability and professional indemnity insurance so that the RCH can maintain their registration
- f immediately notify NARCH if a RCH has left their Centre so NARCH can amend the RCH's record accordingly
- g should not speak or write disparagingly about a colleague to a third party, since the effect is to undermine public confidence in the profession

11.0 Disclosure of information – client confidentiality guidance

- a the RCH/client relationship is founded on trust, and a RCH must not disclose to any third party any information about either the client or the patient without the client's permission
- b in circumstances where the client has not given permission for disclosure, but the RCH believes that animal welfare or public interest are compromised, information should be passed to the relevant authorities. You may also consult NARCH for advice or guidance about the correct course of action
- c permission to pass on confidential information may be expressed or implied
- d permission may also be implied from circumstances, for example, completing a claim under a pet insurance policy, when the insurance company becomes entitled to receive all information relevant to the claim and to seek clarification if required
- e case records including video film, photographs and similar documents are the property of, and should be retained by, the RCH in the interests of animal welfare and for their own protection.
- f The Data Protection Acts of 1984 and 1998 give anyone the right to be informed about any personal data relating to themselves on payment of a reasonable administration charge
- g at the request of a client, a RCH must provide copies of any relevant treatment records, film, photos or similar
- h care is essential in when recording client or patient details and/or writing patient treatment notes to ensure that records are accurate and that the notes are comprehensible and legible to a third party. Use of non standard abbreviations or personal shorthand/code is not appropriate, as this can lead to misunderstanding or misinterpretation
- i disclosure of records may be ordered in disciplinary or court hearings and NARCH may request copies of case records routinely in the course of investigating a complaint or for audit or quality control checks

12.0 Your responsibilities under the law

A Registered Canine Hydrotherapist should be sufficiently familiar with and comply with legislation which may include, but is not limited to:

- a the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 and associated orders and statutory instruments - never suggest a diagnosis to a client – in the UK it is illegal for anyone other than a veterinary surgeon to make a diagnosis
- b the Animal Welfare Act and the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act
- c the Dangerous Dogs Act
- d the Health and Safety at Work Act, Control of Substances Hazardous to the Health (COSHH), Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) and other similar legislation as it applies to the hydrotherapy centre
- e the Data Protection Act as it applies to professional and client records
- f employment, Inland Revenue, VAT and social security legislation as it applies to a hydrotherapy centre
- g any other relevant animal health or welfare legislation relating to animal health, disease control, animal breeding, public health and zoonoses
- h legislation relating to all forms of discrimination, including but not limited to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion and age

You will find useful web links on the NARCH website www.narch.org.uk

13.0 Your responsibilities if things go wrong

All clients should be actively encouraged in the first instance to discuss any problems or concerns with the hydrotherapist or hydrotherapy centre manager/owner as appropriate

A sympathetic approach should be used in response to a complaint rather than immediate denial and defensiveness. An expression of sorrow that an animal has died or that someone is distressed by what has happened is appropriate and does not in itself amount to an admission of liability

13.1 A RCH must:

- a respond promptly and constructively to any request from NARCH for comments in relation to any allegation or complaint made against them
- b promptly supply copies of any paperwork and treatment records requested by NARCH
- c be prepared to explain and justify to clients or colleagues any action or decision taken in the course of their professional activities
- d maintain hydrotherapy treatment records that show clear clinical reasoning and justification for treatment

14.0 Fees, pet insurance and related matters

- a pet insurance schemes depend on the integrity of the hydrotherapist who has responsibilities to both the client and the insurance company. Any factors which might cause the insurance company to increase the premium or to decline a claim must be disclosed
- b where a patient is covered by pet insurance, the client should be advised to confirm the extent of the cover under the policy, including any limitations on cost or any exclusions which would apply to hydrotherapy treatment
- c all invoices should be itemised showing the amounts relating to goods and services provided by the centre
- d when dealing directly with the owner, or the owner's agent, it is important to obtain consent for treatment in writing on a properly drafted form. The form should include the centre's terms and conditions
- e when treating a patient covered by pet insurance the fees charged must be at the normal centre rate and any additional or administrative charges shown separately
- f completed insurance claims together with supporting documentation should be returned to the client and it is the client who should submit the claim to the insurance company
- g in cases where a client consistently refuses to pay, or delays payment, the RCH or hydrotherapy centre is entitled to refuse treatment and should notify the client's veterinary practice of the reasons for the decision
- h in cases where a client is abusive or violent towards yourself, other members of staff or other clients, the RCH or hydrotherapy centre is entitled to refuse treatment and should notify the client's veterinary practice of the reasons for the decision

15.0 Promoting your services

- 15.1 hydrotherapy centres should provide clients, particularly those new to the hydrotherapy centre, with comprehensive written information on the nature and scope of the centre's services including:
- a what services the centre is able to provide
 - b which members of staff are qualified and registered with NARCH
 - c initial and ongoing costs of treatment
 - d information on the care of patients
 - e the centre's complaints-handling policy
 - f centre opening times
 - g fee or charging structures
 - h use of client data and data protection
 - i access to and ownership of records, photographs and film
- 15.2 the name chosen for a hydrotherapy centre should not mislead the public as to the nature or extent of the services offered
- 15.3 wording and images used for advertising, publicity materials, website or social media should be original or used under licence (see 15.5)
- 15.4 all publicity must be legal, decent, honest and truthful in compliance with the general law and the British Codes of Advertising Practice and Sales Promotion
- 15.5 you must comply with copyright law and you should obtain written permission for use of wording/images which are not owned by the centre
- 15.6 if an RCH is suspended or removed from the List of Registered Canine Hydrotherapists all references to NARCH and NARCH logos must be removed from printed materials, websites and social media with immediate effect
- 15.7 if a hydrotherapy centre is removed from the NARCH list all references to NARCH and NARCH logos must be removed from printed materials, websites and social media with immediate effect
- 15.8 NARCH reserve the right to contact Trading Standards if a RCH or Centre fails to comply with 15.6 and/or 15.7 within a reasonable time frame