Compulsory microchipping was implemented by the Government in April 2016 to help a) return owners to their dogs more quickly, and b) track down owners of dogs that carry out attacks on people. IMAGE: Fotolia/luckybusiness.

Continuing our look at compulsory microchipping legislation one year on, VN Times editor Rebecca Hubbard talks to VNs “at the coalface” about how the law impacted practice both
immediately after implementation, and 12 months later.

- Part 1 can be found here.

Amanda Tucker

Head nurse at Summerleaze Veterinary Hospital in Berkshire

Amanda Tucker.

As we were able to educate clients prior to April 2016, the period of change was not specifically busier. We also had the opportunity to implant microchips as required, once we knew that the legislation was coming. Media coverage of the legislation was thorough, and we were able to use our social media to assist with informing clients of the change.

The legislation didn’t cause any problems within our practice with regards to workload. However, we have taken time to encourage clients to update their records, which is an area where compliance remains an issue. We are regularly unable to use microchip details to reach an owner, and have had to rely on social media multiple times to assist with this.

Regular scanning of patients would alert us to those who are not microchipped. However, I would question the advantage of doing this, and if there was any way that we were able to ensure that the dog is then microchipped.

Roxanne Dixon
VN at Beechwood Vets in Leeds

Roxanne Dixon.

We were very busy in the period after the legislation. Our team was prepared, however, and I do believe that helped – for example, I think I was given enough information on the new protocols to ease proceedings. We all worked together and helped out whenever anyone needed it.

The impact the legislation has had on client interaction is amazing. If it’s law, it works – simple as that. In fact, I believe more pet ownership law should be in – less neglect and cruelty, coupled with more understanding of the five welfare needs.

There was an extra workload but it was worth it – most lost dogs can now be reunited back to their owners the very same day.

The biggest problem is unchipped animals, especially as I believe it should be compulsory to scan every animal when the come to the practice. I have seen first hand the issues in practice when there hasn’t been a scan before consultation/surgery.

For example, I have seen cats come in for neutering that have only been scanned because they were in for ID chipping too. We have often found a chip, discovering it belongs to a different owner. At this point, the animals have already been neutered.

Philippa Richmond
Deputy nurse manager at Willows Veterinary Hospital in Cheshire

Philippa Richmond.

“After the legislation was introduced, practice was a little busier, but we were well prepared so did not cause any problems. In fact, more clients actually booked in just prior to the enforcement of the legislation, which helped spread the extra demand over a longer period.

“We have found many of our clients are aware of the legal requirement to have a microchip, and we are seeing less unchipped dogs since it was introduced. There are still a small number who are not but we speak to our clients about the legislation and once they know it is compulsory, they are keen to have a microchip placed.

“We have found the legislation to be most successful with puppies, as information about the compulsory microchipping is in our puppy packs. Before the legislation, they might have decided to put the microchipping off and then easily forgotten but now, they see from a very early stage it is something they have to do. All the puppies we see now are being microchipped immediately which is great. Those which are not microchipped tend to be older animals.

“Looking to the future, I think one of the most important things is to educate pet owners on the need to keep details updated and a campaign which raises awareness of this would be useful.

“Many chipped dogs have incorrect details registered for them when we get in touch with the database, including their address and contact number. In one case I dealt with, the dog was registered as a horse!”
“I believe implementing compulsory scanning for all patients upon entering the practice would be beneficial. Many microchips move from their original implanted location, so scanning regularly would allow us to check location and record this on the patient’s file. The client could then also be made aware of this. It wouldn’t really add to the workload as it takes seconds to scan a patient. It would be useful to then access the relevant database and discuss with the client if the details are up to date so if not they can be advised of how to update them.”

Katie Hartnoll

Head VN at Abbeycroft Veterinary Centre in Northwich

Katie Hartnoll.

“Responsible pet ownership involves ensuring they are microchipped and that details are up to date. Therefore I was all for the introduction of the compulsory legislation.

“It was very busy in the lead up to and just after the legislation was introduced, and one of the main issues we had was with the registration database, which kept crashing when we tried to register the details – this caused us a backlog of work.

“While I think the legislation has encouraged more dog owners to get their pets microchipped, I still think more needs to be done to educate pet owners on the laws surrounding easy identification of your pet should they get lost. Raising awareness shouldn’t stop here. A lot of people don’t realise that it is law for your dog to be wearing a collar with an ID tag stating your name and address whenever your pet is in a public place.
“It is these simple steps that make reuniting a pet with its owner so much easier, taking the responsibility off police, members of the public and veterinary professionals.

“One of the other main problems is that people forget to update the database when they move address or change their phone number. It is very frustrating when a lost or stray animal is brought to you and the details on file are of no use. This problem is not helped by the fact some companies charge to update the details, which can be off-putting to clients and is awkward to us when we have to warn them of this.

“I can see where people coming from with compulsory scanning, but I am not sure how it would work in practice. I think it is right to work with a client to regularly check the chip because they can migrate, or even be faulty, but I think this would be better employed as part of the routine checks we do with them, such as when they come for vaccinations. Checking them every time may be stressful for some dogs who really don’t like the look of the scanner and a bit unnecessary.”

Stefanie Healey
Head nurse at Studley Road Veterinary Surgery in Bedfordshire

I didn’t think the initial period after the legislation was introduced was ridiculously busy, but I noticed more dogs being booked in for microchipping, while clients would ask about it more than they did before.

Compulsory scanning of chips is a good idea, even if it’s an owner we see regularly, but I think it would take a lot of time to check the details of every chip, especially in a busy evening surgery time.

I do wonder if anyone else is making sure dogs are microchipped. I have never seen anyone or heard of anyone – outside of veterinary practice – checking?