Summary Meeting Notes from the Member Meeting discussing the CMA remedies May 13th 2025

Overall Concerns and Challenges:

- **CMA's Approach:** Many attendees felt the CMA's proposed remedies didn't reflect the realities of veterinary practice, and didn't adequately consider the information shared with them. There's a sentiment that the CMA has a pre-set agenda and is prioritizing publicity over practical solutions.
- **Profitability:** A significant concern is the lack of consideration for practice profitability in the CMA's analysis. The proposed remedies, particularly mandatory prescriptions and price capping, are feared to negatively impact revenue and potentially make smaller practices unviable.
- **Practicality & Workload:** Implementing many of the proposed remedies (mandatory prescriptions, detailed price lists) would significantly increase administrative burden and workload for vets and staff, taking time away from clinical care. Many systems won't interoperate with the current technologies.
- **Impact on Client Relationships:** There's worry that focusing heavily on price transparency will damage the vet-client relationship, turning it into a purely transactional interaction and undermining the value of veterinary expertise. The mandatory QR codes on subscriptions will give a sales advantage to large corporations over local businesses.
- **Fairness and Market Distortion:** Concerns were raised that some remedies (like favouring online pharmacies) could unfairly benefit large corporations (who also own the pharmacies) and disadvantage independent practices.
- **Lack of Evidence:** Several speakers pointed out the lack of solid evidence for the CMA's claims of veterinary practices charging exorbitant prices and the disproportionate amount of time all people involved must spend responding to this.

Specific Remedies and Associated Challenges:

- **Mandatory Prescriptions:**
  - **Challenges:** Increased workload (generating prescriptions for every medication), potential for client confusion and dissatisfaction, the administrative burden of documenting declined prescriptions, and potential disruption of the consulting style.
  - **Potential Solutions:** Focus prescriptions to long term medicines (voluntary or mandatory?). Self-certification that a prescription was offered and declined.
- **Price Lists and Comparison Websites:**
  - **Challenges:** Difficult to create accurate and comparable price lists due to the complexity of veterinary services and the variations in treatment. Risk of "race to the bottom" on prices, potentially sacrificing quality of care. The sheer number of procedures that may be required on these lists, with only a few used, makes it a largely wasted exercise.
  - **Potential Solutions:** Client portal with enhanced Find A Vet information. This would allow for a much wider benefit to the client than simply displaying a list of prices without context.
  - Text to provided with prices to show the value for what the client is paying and limit that to practice website rather than have a Comparison site. Transparency rather than complex Comparison

- **Restrictions on Out-of-Hours Providers:**
  - **Challenges:** They already exist for good reasons. The contracts are designed to create a business solution for the very existance of the OOH provider from the outset.
  - **Potential Solutions:** Don't restrict contract terms too much as this as they would be very detrimental to the quality of veterinary care of the OOH provider was to close.

Proposed Actions and Solutions:

- **Collective Response:** Continue working together through the working group (BVA, BSAVA, SPVS, VMG, BVNA) to create a collective response to the CMA's proposals.
- **Individual Submissions:** Encourage individual practices to submit their own responses to the CMA, emphasizing the impact of the remedies on their specific practices. The CMA values hearing from people on the front line.
- **Highlighting Practical Concerns:** Focus on demonstrating the practical challenges and unintended consequences of the proposed remedies.

- **Focusing on Positive Solutions:** Propose alternative solutions that address the CMA's concerns while minimizing disruption to veterinary practices and client relationships.
- **Empowering Clients:** Emphasize the importance of empowering clients with information to make informed decisions about their pet's care, rather than solely focusing on price or mandating changes.

Potential Solutions:

- Single, national prescription fee nationwide to be similar for a manageable billing structure or ideally no cap at all and rely on commercial drivers with full transparency on price list on practice website. If a cap set it has to be realistic to avoid cross subsidy
- Offer prescriptions to the clients that need them rather than waste time explaining about prescriptions to clients who would be financially worse off by deploying this route..
- If mandatory prescriptions move forward then it is important that any problems with medicines are handled by the internet pharmacy rather than the local vet having to handle the complexities of differing products/ licences etc,
- Single bit of software to create a portal prescription would be ideal but costly and difficult to implement.
- Need to have time for any solution to be deployed to avoid disadvantaging independent practices
- Push for clients to be given "thinking time" is a good idea but not practical in urgent situations
- Let the market decide about fees, not by price capping.
- Focus on improving value for the client and also demonstrating this clearly. For the client to build a value proposition they need information on quality as well as price.
- Have a better understanding of the client (what do they want?). Their needs will change as the market changes.

In essence, the meeting highlights a strong sense of unease and opposition to the CMA's current proposals, with a call for more practical, evidence-based solutions that consider the realities of veterinary practice and the importance of the vet-client relationship.