

# Use of Non-Conventional Therapies in the Practice of Veterinary Medicine

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## Introduction

**In recent years, members of the public have demonstrated an increased interest in the access to various non-conventional therapies. The popularity and prevalence of these therapies has grown in both human and veterinary medicine.**

**As the use of non-conventional therapies continues to expand in the practice of veterinary medicine, the safety and quality of the treatment and/or care provided to animal(s) remains paramount to animal welfare and the public interest.**

**Non-conventional therapies are provided by both veterinarians and non-veterinarians. This position statement serves to communicate Council's position on the use of non-conventional therapies by veterinarians in their own practice and those veterinarians who collaborate with non-veterinary animal care providers.**

## Background

Conventional veterinary medicine is the foundation of veterinary practice. Outside of conventional medicine, there are a variety of therapies broadly referred to as non-conventional therapies. Non-conventional therapies exist on a wide and evolving spectrum that ranges from higher to lower



risk in relation to their safety, efficacy, evidence base, and acceptance within conventional veterinary medicine.

The College's previous *Position Statement: The Practice of Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine*, published over ten years ago, stated the use of complementary and alternative therapies constituted the practice of veterinary medicine and could only be performed by a veterinarian or under a veterinarian's supervision or delegation. Today this is no longer realistic. The public's expectation, in both human and animal healthcare, is to have access to, and choice in, selecting a provider for lower-risk non-conventional therapies.

The current reality is that many non-veterinarians are providing non-conventional therapies as treatment and/or care to animal(s), with or without veterinarian input. In most cases, the College does not consider this the practice of veterinary medicine. Exclusive scopes of practice, where all treatment and/or care for an animal(s) is provided by a veterinarian solely, are no longer feasible nor reasonable. The boundaries between conventional medicine and non-conventional therapies are not absolute. An updated regulatory approach that is risk-focused is required.

## Definitions

**Conventional Veterinary Medicine:** Conventional veterinary medicine is defined as the type of treatment, diagnostic analysis, and conceptualization of disease or ailment that is the primary focus of the curricula of university faculties of veterinary medicine. Conventional veterinary medicine can also be referred to as traditional veterinary medicine or evidence-based veterinary medicine and is the type of veterinary medicine that is generally provided in veterinary hospitals and in clinical practice.<sup>1</sup>

**Non-Conventional Therapy:** Non-conventional therapy is defined as treatment and/or care that exists outside of conventional veterinary medicine. When non-conventional therapies are used in combination with conventional veterinary medicine, they are considered as integrative therapies. When they are used instead of conventional veterinary medicine, they are considered as alternative therapies.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario Policy Statement #3-11: Complementary/Alternative Medicine



## Position

Council acknowledges the continual evolution of the practice of veterinary medicine. Contemporary veterinary practice often includes the use of both conventional veterinary medicine and non-conventional therapies. Council's mandate is veterinary medicine and animal health and welfare, and includes the oversight of the use of both conventional and nonconventional therapies in the treatment and/or care of animals. This position balances access to care, consumer choice, and accountability.

If a veterinarian chooses to integrate non-conventional therapies into their conventional veterinary medicine practice, Council expects that the veterinarian considers:

- The veterinarian's individual sphere of competence;
- the level of evidence available for the therapy;
- the assessment of safety of the therapy; • the animal(s)' diagnosis (whether confirmed or differential);
- the animal's treatment needs; and
- their assessment and confidence in the competence of other providers who they are collaborating with, where applicable.

Council expects that a veterinarian who chooses to integrate non-conventional therapies into conventional veterinary medicine or to use them as an alternative to conventional veterinary medicine be licensed with the College, adhere to the published standards of practice of the profession, and obtain informed client consent in accordance with the College's *Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*. A veterinarian choosing to offer only a nonconventional therapy for the treatment of an animal(s) is expected not to hold that nonconventional therapy out as equivalent to, or better than, conventional medicine, unless said claim is supported by clear and consistent evidence, nor to recommend therapies that have been proven ineffective through scientific study.

Council strongly encourages professional collaboration between veterinary and non-veterinary providers with an aim to ensuring that sound diagnostics lead to a treatment and/or plan specific to the animal(s) and its circumstances.



## Legislative Authority

*Veterinarians Act* R.S.O. 1990, c. V.3 s. 3

Ontario Regulation 1093 R.S.O. 1990 s. 19 made under the *Veterinarians Act*.

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website ([www.cvo.org](http://www.cvo.org)) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.