



THE COLLEGE OF  
VETERINARIANS  
OF ONTARIO

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# INFO SHEET

## THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

### INTRODUCTION

The College of Veterinarians of Ontario licenses veterinarians and regulates the practice of veterinary medicine in the province of Ontario. The responsibilities of the College are set out in the **Veterinarians Act**. In governing the practice of veterinary medicine, the College is dedicated to protecting the public interest.

One of the College's many responsibilities is to oversee the professional conduct of Ontario veterinarians.

Through its complaints committee, the College investigates specific complaints about veterinarians related to the practice of veterinary medicine.

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**How does the complaints process start?**

In order for the College to review and investigate complaints from the public, the complaint must be received from the complainant by the College in writing. The statement of complaint should clearly and precisely set out the following information:

- the name(s) of the veterinarian(s) being complained about
- the name of the veterinary facility
- a description of the problem
- an outline of the concerns or issues for the committee to consider
- the dates on which the events occurred
- the name and contact information of anyone else who may be able to provide further information
- copies of invoices or other documentation that may aid the committee in its review of the issues
- the complainant's full name and mailing address

**Are all letters of complaint forwarded to the complaints committee?**

Letters of complaint are reviewed by the staff of the College. If appropriate, a staff member may attempt to respond to or resolve the concerns through an informal approach. If an informal approach is inappropriate, not desired by either party, or unsuccessful, then the matter is directed to the complaints committee.

**What happens next?**

If the matter is directed to the complaints committee, the staff begin an investigation.

**What does the investigation involve?**

The veterinarian is notified of the complaint and provided with a copy. The issues or concerns arising from the letter of complaint are summarized and forwarded to the complainant for verification. The list of issues are then forwarded to the veterinarian responding to the complaint. The veterinarian is given an opportunity to submit a written explanation, pertinent medical records, x-rays, logs etc. to the College. Unless the complaint is determined to originate from a "third party" the veterinarian's full response is copied to the complainant, who is in turn provided a final opportunity to reply.

**What happens if other veterinarians are involved?**

Other veterinarians involved in the treatment of the patient may be asked for their comments, records etc. for the committee to review.

**Then what happens?**

The entire investigative file is forwarded to the members of a panel of the complaints committee.

**Who are the members of the complaints committee?**

The committee consists of up to ten members, nine of whom are practicing veterinarians. The other is a public member appointed by the provincial government. The committee meets in panels consisting of five or six members.

**How does the complaints committee function?**

The committee reviews between 10 and 12 new cases at each meeting, which are held approximately every six weeks, twice per month. Most cases are considered in a single meeting but some are deferred in order to request further information, including expert advice in some cases.

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**What decisions can the committee make?**

Possible decisions include:

1. The committee has no concerns with the veterinarian's actions or conduct and will take no further action.
2. The committee has some concerns with the veterinarian's actions or conduct which it feels can be addressed through re-education.
3. The committee has very serious concerns and has referred the case for a hearing of the discipline committee.
4. The complaint was frivolous, vexatious, made in bad faith or for an improper purpose and is otherwise an abuse of process.

The decision of the committee is prepared in writing and sent to the complainant(s) and the responding veterinarian(s) following the decision. Decisions are not provided over the telephone by college staff.

**Can the complaints committee award money or damages?**

No, only the courts can do this.

**What recourse is there if the complainant or the veterinarian is dissatisfied with the decision of the committee?**

There is a review mechanism available to either party through the Health Professions Appeal and Review Board. This board, established by the provincial government, reviews decisions of the committee, when requested.

*INFO SHEETS of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario provide veterinarians and the public with information about the governance of veterinarians in Ontario or contain practice parameters and standards that should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients, dealings with their clients and the welfare of their staff.*

*It is important to note that these INFO SHEETS may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional activities have been maintained.*

*The College of Veterinarians of Ontario regulates veterinarians in Ontario in the public interest.*

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**A written statement of complaint may be submitted to:**  
Manager of Complaints and Discipline  
College of Veterinarians of Ontario