



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

POLICY STATEMENT

After-Hours Care

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Purpose of the Policy Statement

This policy statement explains the College's interpretation of the legislated requirements for veterinarians to provide care outside of regular practice hours. Four key requirements are discussed: options for providing after-hours care, continuity of care, notification of clients and informed consent for the hospitalization of animals after-hours.

Overview of Regulation 1093, Section 20 (*Veterinarians Act*)

Regulation 1093, Section 20 requires veterinarians to provide medically necessary services in a reasonably prompt fashion to their clients' animals outside of regular practice hours. Section 20 does not apply to veterinarians who provide veterinary services in or from a temporary facility, unless compliance with section 20 is a condition of the facility's certificate of accreditation. The intent of the regulation is to ensure that clients whose animals have been and/or are usually treated during regular office hours by a veterinarian, or by one of several veterinarians in a practice, have access to necessary medical services for their animals at times when the practice is closed.

Requirement to Provide Services After-Hours

A veterinarian meets his/her obligation to provide after-hours services in a number of ways. Veterinarians may choose to:

- be "on-call" for his/her clients and provide after-hours services themselves or by colleagues at the same facility;

- arrange coverage with a colleague who has agreed to be “on-call” for his/her clients;
- join a “call group” comprising members from a number of practices that cover for each other’s practices on a rotating schedule;
- refer patients to a hospital or clinic that advertises 24/7 service; or
- refer clients to an Emergency Clinic which, under Regulation 1093, must be open, at a minimum, from 7 pm – 8 am on weekdays, on weekends from 7 pm Friday until 8 am Monday and from 7 pm the day prior to a statutory holiday until 8 am the morning after. In these circumstances, the veterinarian is required to see patients promptly after their discharge from the emergency facility if ongoing care is necessary until services are no longer required or until the client has had a reasonable opportunity to arrange for care.

Requirement for Continuity of Care

While the College acknowledges that a veterinarian is not required to accept into his/her practice any prospective clients or patients that they do not wish to serve, it considers that the temporary provision of services to another veterinarian’s clients and patients when no other access to care is available is an accepted professional expectation. The College encourages veterinarians to cooperate with colleagues and establish agreements that enable the provision of necessary veterinary services to clients and patients when their own veterinarian is not available.

Occasionally, a veterinarian is unable to make appropriate arrangements to provide coverage during times when he/she is not available to clients. Factors that could reasonably prevent coverage might be distance or expertise. Since a legislated requirement is not being met, the College expects that all efforts to make service arrangements are documented.

Requirement to Notify Clients

When the Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) is established, the veterinarian is expected to advise his/her clients of the arrangements for after-hours coverage and to keep records of each time this information is provided.

A veterinarian is expected to take reasonable steps to notify his/her clients of any unavoidable or planned absences, such as vacation, when services will not be available. Such steps include an appropriate voice message, signage on the door of the facility or electronic notice instructing clients who to contact for service. The veterinarian should keep a record of each time this information is provided.

Requirement for Informed Consent When an Animal is Hospitalized After Hours

A veterinarian is expected to obtain informed owner consent that ensures that the client understands and accepts the level of care and supervision provided when animals are housed in that veterinarian's facility overnight.

Legislative Authority

R.R.O. 1990, Reg 1093, s. 20 (*Veterinarians Act*)

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