



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

POLICY STATEMENT

Applicant Character Assessment

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Purpose

This policy explains, in the interests of transparency and fairness, how the College of Veterinarians of Ontario assesses information from or about applicants for whom evidence of past conduct raises questions about their ability to engage in the practice of veterinary medicine with honesty and integrity,¹ which is also known as “good character.”²

Scope

This policy applies to all applicants for licensure to practise veterinary medicine in Ontario—including those who apply under the pan-Canadian Agreement on Internal Trade.

Background

A requirement for initial registration in a regulated profession is that the applicant’s past history does not afford reasonable ground for believing that he or she will not practise veterinary medicine with honesty or integrity.

Members of a profession are generally assumed to be of good character unless and until evidence demonstrates otherwise. Good character remains an ongoing expectation of licensed

¹ See Appendix 2, ss. 14 (2).

² See Appendix 1, Definitions.

veterinarians, as well, who submit declarations about their conduct to the College as part of the annual licence renewal process.

Applicants to the veterinary medical profession in Ontario are required to make declarations as to whether there have been findings or allegations against them that indicate their conduct or character might be in question. Many colleges refer to this requirement as the “good character” or “conduct” requirement for entry into the profession.

The Registration Committee of the College carries out reviews of applications from individuals who do have findings, current proceedings, or allegations against them, in order to determine if the issuance of a licence—with or without limitations and/or conditions placed on it—is in the public interest.

Definitions

Character: Character is an individual’s values, attitudes, ethics, integrity, honesty, and manner in which relationships are established and maintained; usually evaluated by an assessment of conduct.

Conduct: Conduct is the measurable actions and behaviours of an individual.

Conduct unbecoming a member: Conduct unbecoming a member is conduct that occurs either inside or outside of the practice environment and that has the potential to bring the profession into disrepute.

Ethical: Ethical is when one is able to distinguish right from wrong and has the courage to do the right thing under the circumstances, regardless of personal consequences.

Finding: Finding is a decision made by an authority for a jurisdiction that an individual is guilty of misconduct, criminal activity or incompetence, or that an individual is impaired. Other than impairment findings, examples of findings and/or proceedings that the College reviews as part of the application assessment process include:

- Any criminal record;
- Any court finding of an offense resulting in incarceration, including house arrest, or a fine of more than \$1,000;
- Cheating on examinations or assignments;
- Incompetence or practicing below the professional standard of medical care;
- Falsification of records;
- Selling drugs without a VCPR; and
- Harassment, discrimination, abuse.

Good Character: Good character is generally held to mean that an individual is honest, trustworthy, responsible, and ethical.

Good Standing: Good standing is a status with the regulatory body that indicates a licensed professional's fees and practice information have been submitted as required.

Impairment: Impairment is a medical condition or disorder, either physical or mental, which has the potential to negatively impact an individual's ability to perform in his/her capacity as a regulated professional.

Jurisdiction: Jurisdiction is an area over which an authority governs, be it geographical (provincial, federal), professional (regulators that govern a group of licensed, registered or certified individuals; examination boards), or legal (criminal or civil).

Letter of Standing: Letter of Standing is an official document issued by a regulatory body on request that includes information about the licensure history of a licensee or former licensee.

Offence: Offence is a violation or breach of a law. This includes criminal offences, as well as any other offences under federal, provincial or municipal statutes.

Proceeding: Proceeding is a formal hearing by a court, tribunal, or statutory committee of the body that is authorized by government to regulate a profession and its members.

Professionalism: Professionalism is a set of behaviours that together demonstrate the character that is expected for a member of the profession to possess.

Professional misconduct: Professional misconduct is unacceptable conduct carried out within the scope of the professional's practice, as defined in Reg. 1093 under the *Veterinarians Act* or under a similar provision in another jurisdiction.

Policy

Veterinarians are expected to demonstrate honesty and integrity in all of their actions, to practice in a safe and professional manner, and to comply with all legislation, regulations, College By-laws, and policy governing the profession. Given the high level of importance of character and conduct to the practice of veterinary medicine, the College carefully assesses applications for licensure from individuals who

- have had a finding by, or are the subject of a current proceeding at, a regulatory body in Ontario or another jurisdiction, or
- have had a conviction or finding of guilt (even if discharged or pardoned), or there is a current proceeding based on charges, for an offence,

in order to determine whether or not the applicant meets the "good character" requirement before a licence may be issued. In addition, an applicant's previous conduct must afford reasonable grounds for the belief that he or she will practise veterinary medicine in a safe and professional manner.

These reviews are carried out by the Registration Committee, which assesses all relevant information and renders a decision that might range from a refusal to licence, to directing the issuance of a licence with specific conditions and/or limitations placed on it, to issuing an unrestricted licence.

Providing false or misleading information that is relevant to the member's suitability to practise veterinary medicine, either knowingly or in circumstances where the applicant ought to have known the information was false or misleading, will impact the assessment of good character.

Registration Committee Assessments

Procedural Fairness

When making decisions about the issuance of a licence, the College is committed to ensuring that:

1. Decisions are made in the public interest.
2. Decisions are made using a process that is transparent and fair, by committee members acting in an objective and impartial manner.
3. Decisions are grounded in reasons that are fully explained in writing.
4. Decisions are made on the specific merits of the case under review.

Committee Role and Options

The Registration Committee reviews applications from individuals who may not meet all licensure requirements.

In cases where the licensure requirement may not be met, the Registration Committee will review reported incidents in order to make a determination of whether the applicant meets the "good character" requirement at the time of application.

Supporting Documentation Submitted by the Applicant

If an applicant answers "yes" to any declaration question on the application form, the College recommends that he/she provide additional supporting documentation as follows:

- A personal statement describing the circumstances of the incident(s).
- Official copies of any court transcripts, charges, reports, Orders, evidence of compliance, discharges, pardons, etc.

Applicants are responsible for making arrangements at their own expense with the proper authorities to have official information (such as transcripts) sent directly to the College.

- An explanation as to why the incident(s) did not/no longer has/have an impact on the practice of veterinary medicine (for example, is there evidence that rehabilitation and/or remediation was successful?)
- Evidence of the completion of any Order imposed by a court or another regulatory body.
- Letters of reference from employers or colleagues who are aware of the facts of the matter.
- Letters from physicians or others engaged in the treatment of the applicant, if appropriate, providing a professional opinion on the current capacity of the applicant to practice.

The College keeps all information confidential except as required or allowed by law.

Committee Considerations for each Assessment

In each case, several factors will be considered by the Registration Committee *vis à vis* the conduct under review, as outlined below.

1. The nature of the conduct, including:
 - a. The seriousness and impact of the incident(s);
 - b. How long ago the incident(s) occurred;
 - c. The relevance to professional practice.

2. The honesty and completeness of the submission by the applicant:
 - a. Has the applicant made an honest declaration on the application form? Or
 - b. Did the College learn of an issue on receipt of a Letter of Standing from another jurisdiction?

3. The consequential actions of the applicant, such as:
 - a. The outcome of any remediation or rehabilitation undertaken.
 - b. The expression of remorse by the applicant.
 - c. The subsequent practise of veterinary medicine by the applicant with no further evidence of conduct issues arising.

Committee Decisions

Placing relevant and appropriate conditions and/or limitations on a licence (such as an undertaking, supervision, or educational requirements) will be considered as a potential means of protecting both the public interest and the reputation of the profession where appropriate.

All decisions of the Registration Committee may be appealed by the applicant to the Health Professions Review and Appeal Board (HPRB) within 30 days of receipt of the written Decision & Reasons document.

Legislative Authority

Veterinarians Act R.S.O. 1990, s. 14
R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: General s. 3

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) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.