



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARD

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

Published: July 2016

Introduction

The veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is one of the foundations of effective veterinary care and service. A VCPR is established when a veterinarian agrees with a client to provide veterinary services to an animal or a group of animals or herd.

A VCPR must exist before a veterinarian recommends or provides any veterinary services (including prescribing, dispensing, or administering drugs) for any animal or group of animals or herd, unless one of the listed exceptions applies. Veterinarians must ensure that they meet the Practice Expectations for establishing, maintaining, and terminating a VCPR.

Definitions

Client: Client means, with respect to a veterinarian, the owner of an animal(s), group of animals, or herd(s) that the veterinarian is treating, an authorized representative of the owner, or an individual who the veterinarian reasonably determines is acting in the interest of the animal(s).

Herd health: In herd health medicine, the veterinarian does not always need to examine each animal on the premises before making medical recommendations, but, through periodic visits to the premises and discussions with the client, he or she must acquire and maintain a current understanding of the level of husbandry practiced on the premises, and of the client's abilities with respect to recognizing signs of disease and administering drugs and treatment plans.

Group of animals: Veterinarians may use a herd-health model to provide services to a group of animals (such as at shelters or with breeders). Through visits to the premises where the group of animals is kept and discussions with the client, the veterinarian must acquire and maintain a current understanding of the managed environment and of the client's abilities with respect to recognizing signs of disease, and administering drugs and treatment plans.

Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship when he/she:

1. Establishes a VCPR prior to recommending and/or providing treatment or veterinary services (including the prescribing, dispensing, or administering of drugs) for any animal, group of animals, or herd.
2. Understands that a VCPR is established when the veterinarian:
 - Has been retained by the client;
 - Has reached an agreement with the client as to the scope of the services to be provided by the veterinarian; and
 - Has advised the client that services will only be provided in accordance with the standards of practice of the profession.
3. Obtains the client's informed consent for each service or group of services to be provided.
4. Maintains recent and sufficient knowledge of an animal or group of animals or herd to continue to provide veterinary services. What constitutes "recent and sufficient knowledge" is a matter of the professional judgment of the veterinarian in the individual case. When making a diagnosis or prescribing, administering, or dispensing a drug, recent and sufficient knowledge is a matter of a history and inquiry and either a physical examination of the animal or groups of animals or medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal or group of animals are kept to reach at least a general or preliminary diagnosis.
5. Ensures that he or she is readily available in case of an adverse reaction to a drug or a failure in a regimen of therapy, or informs his or her clients as to how they can access services outside of the veterinarian's regular practice hours, in accordance with the After-Hours Care policy statement.
6. Provides a client with adequate written notice of the termination of a VCPR, allowing the client a reasonable amount of time in which to arrange for care with another

veterinarian. This includes designating a period of time for which emergency services will be provided, and ensuring the appropriate transfer of medical records and other relevant information.

Exceptions to the Requirement for a VCPR:

Exceptions to the requirement that a VCPR must be established before a veterinarian can provide veterinary services (including prescribing, dispensing, or administering drugs) may exist in some circumstances. These include where a veterinarian:

- (a) Acting reasonably, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services;
- (b) Is an employee or contractor of the Crown in right of Canada or the Crown in right of Ontario and is providing veterinary services as part of that employment or contractual relationship;
- (c) Is providing veterinary services in or from a temporary facility;¹
- (d) Is providing veterinary services that are permitted or required under the *Dog Owners' Liability Act*, the *Animals for Research Act*, the *Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, the *Animal Health Act*, 2009 or under any other Act except for the *Veterinarians Act*,
- (e) Is retained or employed by a person other than an animal's owner to conduct an independent examination of the animal and report on the animal's health to that person;
- (f) Administers or dispenses a drug pursuant to a prescription (other than for a controlled substance):
 - that was issued by another member where it is not reasonably possible for the client to obtain the drug from the prescribing member;
 - where it is necessary in the animal's interests to dispense without delay;
 - where he or she made a reasonable effort to discuss the matter with the prescribing member;
 - where a sufficient assessment of the animal's circumstances is carried out;
 - where the quantity of the drug dispensed is no more than would reasonably enable the client to return to the prescribing member for future prescriptions;
 - and
 - where he or she makes a written record of the transaction; or
- (g) Dispenses non-controlled substances to individuals, agencies, or organizations that treat free-ranging wildlife (whom they may regard as clients) according to the guidelines set by the College.

¹ Such as a member providing services in ophthalmic, cardiac, or deafness screening clinics or conducting electronic identification device (EID) implantation programs in accordance with College policies.

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard

A separate *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship* has been developed by the College. The Guide to the Professional Practice Standard can be found on the College's website at www.cvo.org.

Legislative Authority

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

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: General, s. 1, 17(1)(40), 18, 20, and 33 (*Veterinarians Act*)

Other References

The following can be found on the College's website at www.cvo.org:

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Professional Practice Standard: Delegation

Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Products in Veterinary Practice

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Use of Compounded Products in Veterinary Practice

Policy Statement: Cardiac Screening Programs

Policy Statement: Conducting Programs for the Implantation of Electronic Identification Devices in Companion Animals

Policy Statement: Congenital Deafness Screening Programs for Companion Animals

Policy Statement: Ophthalmic Screening Program

Position Statement: Temporary Emergency Facilities

Policy Statement: After-Hours Care

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.