



PRACTICE ADVICE

COLLEGE UPDATES SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE FOR PROFESSION

Social media refers to the various modes of electronic communication used to share information and create online networks. It includes websites, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik Tok, to name a few. New social media platforms always seem to be popping up and disappearing at a fast rate.

Many veterinary practices use social media to connect with their clients, attract new clients, and post information about their services. Navigating the social media environment can be tricky. When veterinarians use social media platforms as a public forum, they need to consider applying the advertising regulations broadly, maintaining their professionalism, and protecting confidentiality.

The College has provided a resource for veterinarians on social media called [Guidance on the Use of Social Media](#).

This resource has been recently updated and provides valuable tips, including a reminder to avoid intentionally or unintentionally spreading incorrect information through social media.

During the pandemic, some highly publicized matters about spreading incorrect information have surfaced in other professions grappling with this issue. It is a reminder to veterinarians that their opinion is valued and highly regarded in society and information they post on social media should be supported by available evidence.



When using social media, veterinarians and their teams should refer to the following fundamental principles:

- The maintenance of professionalism and ethics
- The importance of privacy and confidentiality
- Compliance with relevant legislation, including the Veterinarians Act, Ontario Regulation 1093, and the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)
- The maintenance of professional and respectful relationships with clients, colleagues, co-workers and staff

Veterinarians and their teams must exercise caution when posting information online that relates to a client or patient, including pictures, videos, or case stories of patients. Unless client consent has been obtained, refrain from posting identifiable client or patient information online to maintain privacy and confidentiality.

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FEATURED

Telemedicine consultation ongoing until November

The College established a professional practice standard on telemedicine in 2016 to acknowledge the increasing use of technology to facilitate and enhance veterinary care in Ontario. This standard supports veterinarians in using virtual modalities in practice and clarifies the expectations related to safety and quality.

The College Council recently approved draft changes to the telemedicine standard for [public consultation](#).

The proposed changes recognize that telemedicine has supported access to veterinary medicine during the pandemic, including the relaxation of rules related to prescribing. Further amendments relate to licensure and the expectation that veterinarians offering services via telemedicine to Ontario animals comply with the licensing requirements and standard of care expectations in the jurisdiction where they are licensed.

[To participate in the consultation and review background information](#), visit the college website.

www.cvo.org/public-consultations

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SEPTEMBER COUNCIL MEETING

COUNCIL APPROVES 2022 BUDGET, WORKS ON POLICY

The College Council continues to meet via videoconference. The public is welcome to tune in to the proceedings through a livestream link. Meeting replays, highlights and minutes are posted on the College website as soon as they are available.

Presentation – Social Justice and the Changing Face of Veterinary Medicine

The Council was pleased to welcome Dr. Karen Ward, of the Toronto Humane Society, and Dr. Shane Bateman, of the Ontario Veterinary College, who delivered a presentation on social justice and the changing face of veterinary medicine. The presenters discussed whether access to veterinary care may be a social justice issue as the benefits of pet ownership are potentially limited to those who can afford to access care for their pets. Their presentation also shared information on not for profit models for veterinary care. [A replay of the presentation is available on the College's website.](#)



Trends & Council Roundtable

Council is attentive to the significant shortage of veterinarians and the current challenges for the public in accessing veterinary services as well as the pressure and strain veterinarians are experiencing.

Other topics presented during the roundtable discussion included the shortage in pet food; abandonment of animals; vaccinations in the workplace; and the current length of time to resolve complaints.

2022 Budget

College Council approved its budget for 2022. Council will not be increasing any fees this year. A significant change in 2022 will be the College's transition to leased space for its Guelph office.

As well, the budget includes the reintroduction of the College's programs and meetings which had been on hold during the pandemic.

Per Diems

Council increased the per diem rate to \$600 per day for those individuals who support the College's work by participating on Council and committees.

Public Policy – Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

In policy work, Council reviewed potential amendments to its practice standard on the veterinarian-client-patient relationship. The objectives of the changes are to modify the expectation for when a veterinarian is discontinuing services to a client and to streamline the language in relation to prescribing and dispensing, as those expectations are now detailed in other policy documents. Following discussion, Council decided to return the draft to staff for further development.

Public Policy – Caveat Emptor

Council has been considering whether it has a role in informing the public about the risks and benefits associated with different animal care options available to the public that are outside of the College's control.

This discussion evolved from Council's work on forms of energy in the treatment of animals and the use of non-conventional therapies in the practice of veterinary medicine. Following discussion of materials presented, Council is proceeding with development of a position statement and will continue to look at this concept in its shared care working group.



JAN ROBINSON RECEIVES LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD RECOGNIZING INNOVATION AND DEDICATION

SUBMITTED BY DR. TYRREL DE LANGLEY, COUNCIL PRESIDENT

As President of the College Council, it is my pleasure to congratulate College Registrar and Chief Executive Officer Jan Robinson as the recipient of the lifetime achievement award, presented by the Council on Licensure, Enforcement and Regulation (CLEAR). CLEAR is the premier international resource for professional regulation stakeholders.

Jan joined the College as the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer in 2012. Prior to this role, she previously served as Registrar at the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario and the College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario.

Throughout her 28-year-career, Jan has been dedicated to innovation in regulation. She regularly leads CLEAR

initiatives and provides guidance to the broader regulatory community, including board member training and advanced regulatory governance training. Jan also has extensive experience working with government on various project and reform efforts.

Our College Council continues to be well-served with Jan's experience, expertise and knowledge as the College strives to achieve our vision of instilling public confidence in veterinary regulation. Our Council, the College and the public we serve all benefit from Jan's dedication and commitment to her role.

The CLEAR Service Award for Lifetime Achievement recognizes an individual who has made an outstanding contribution and commitment to CLEAR, demonstrating dedication and integrity. The recipient shall have shown exceptional leadership, vision and creativity in fulfillment of the goals and objectives of CLEAR.



Jan Robinson
Registrar and Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of the Council and the College, I extend sincere congratulations to Jan on this well-deserved award!

COLLEGE STAFF

Registrar's Office

Jan Robinson,
Registrar & CEO

Sarah Kirby,
Senior Policy & Projects Specialist

Kim Huson,
Executive Partner, Communications

Krithika Jeyaraman,
Community Engagement Coordinator

Corporate Services

Beth Ready,
Executive Partner, Corporate Services

Sarah Ellery,
Records & Risk Officer

Ashley Coles,
Data and Technology Specialist

Louise Brown,
Administrative Support, Corporate Services

Licensure

Shilo Tooze,
Associate Registrar, Licensure

Lindsay Sproule, Principal,
Licensure & Professional Corporations

Sarah Adams,
Associate, Licensure & Professional Corporations

Rose Robinson, Principal,
Investigations & Hearings

Martin Fischer,
Investigations & Inspections Specialist

Cindy Rose,
Associate, Investigations & Hearings

Phillip Evanitski,
Associate, Investigations

Gabriella Klosak, (on leave)
Associate, Licensure & Investigations

Quality Practice

Dr. Kim Lambert,
Associate Registrar, Quality Practice

Dr. Colette Larocque,
Practice Advisor

Dr. Susan Sabatini,
Practice Advisor

Emily Ewles, Principal,
Quality Assurance & Improvement

Aneeta Bharij,
Principal, Accreditation

Cindy Jankovic,
Associate, Quality Practice

Accreditation Inspectors:
Wilf Muller

Adrian Darmon

Dr. Danielle Jongkind

Dr. John Swatman

Dr. Wendy Wideman

HOMWOOD HEALTH PROGRAM

Confidential Ontario Toll-free Line:
1-866-750-3207

The College has partnered with Homewood Health to link veterinarians to resources to support their health, well-being and resilience. Veterinarians who need support are encouraged to contact Homewood Health for assistance.

Stay Well - Your health is important to your competence.

Members of the veterinary profession have a responsibility to uphold standards to ensure the public has access to safe, quality veterinary care. When those standards are compromised, the College responds. Every veterinarian can learn from these situations and publishing the details of complaints received and resolved is intended to support that learning. Learning from peers is best. The example below is taken from an actual case that went before the Complaints Committee and is offered as a self-reflection tool to improve practice across the province

ADVICE PROVIDED ON RECORDS, COMMUNICATIONS

CASE SUMMARY

The member examined a kitten who had been experiencing lethargy and seizures. The member ordered blood tests and prescribed a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory and an antibiotic. The kitten was discharged. A couple weeks later, the kitten experienced a seizure and the client contacted the member. The member said the blood tests indicated anemia and monocytosis as well as low electrolytes, low albumin and high globulins. Given the significant blood abnormalities, the member advised taking the kitten to an emergency clinic.

At the emergency hospital, the kitten was in critical condition, depressed and dehydrated. The kitten received rewarming measures, oxygen and an intravenous catheter to start rehydration. Another blood sample indicated worsening of the anemia and severe metabolic imbalances. The emergency veterinarian recommended a blood transfusion and critical care. Due to the kitten's critical state and grave prognosis, the kitten was euthanized and his body was sent for cremation. A post mortem was offered and declined by the client.

In the complaint, the client alleged the member was negligent in failing to promptly review the blood test results. As a result, the kitten was not diagnosed in a timely manner and his health deteriorated to the point where he had to be euthanized.

CASE OUTCOMES

The Complaints Committee panel decided that, although serious, the allegations made against the member did not warrant a discipline hearing in the circumstances and therefore, directed that this matter not be referred to the Discipline Committee.

The panel provided advice to the member about his record keeping and his medical management and client communication. It's the member's responsibility to maintain medical records according to the [College standard](#). The member is expected to ensure his medical records include appropriate details about each client communication, which documents discussions with clients about a patient's condition and all laboratory test results. Proper record keeping is an integral component of veterinary practice.

Further, it's the member's responsibility to manage patient care appropriately by communicating diagnostic results in a timely manner. The [College standard on diagnostic laboratory testing](#) states a veterinarian meets the requirements when they "Interpret the results and ensures the results are communicated to clients."

Advice from the Complaints Committee panel is meant to be educative and serves as a remedial tool to assist licensed members in correcting specific areas of practice.

CASE CONSIDERATIONS

In considering a complaint matter, the panel reviews the medical record. In this case, there was a lack of detail in the medical record on communication regarding the kitten's condition. Because of concerns with the member's medical records, the panel provided advice about this important aspect of clinical practice.

According to the member, the kitten did not show any signs of neurological deficit. The kitten was lethargic due to fever but was alert and responsive. The member reviewed differential diagnoses with the client and made recommendations for diagnostic testing, to which she agreed. The following week, the member was

away at a conference and he assumed a locum veterinarian would review the bloodwork results. A staff member contacted the client and was told there was a significant improvement in the kitten's condition. The member said he was unaware the client was not provided with the bloodwork results until the client contacted the clinic. When the member was told of the seizure, he recommended the kitten be taken to an emergency veterinary hospital immediately.

Since no post mortem examination was conducted, a specific diagnosis was not found and it was not possible to determine if earlier intervention would have saved the kitten's life.

The panel noted that regardless of the member's absence, he had a professional obligation to evaluate the bloodwork results and to communicate these results to the client in a timely manner.

The College's record keeping standards require veterinarians to record details of client communication, including discussions pertaining to a patient's condition and any laboratory results. This information was missing from the kitten's medical record.

The panel was concerned the member did not appear to demonstrate sufficient insight into the issues raised in the complaint. In addition, he did not reflect on how he could have managed this situation differently or propose any changes to his practice to ensure that mistakes such as not informing clients of test results would be avoided in the future. The panel reasonably expects the member to have in place a protocol such as maintaining a laboratory log where tests are entered as a precautionary measure to prevent mistakes in not communicating results, such as occurred in this case.

WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON VETERINARY MEDICINE?

It is more important than ever for people to understand the critical links between animal, human, and environmental health. Although the impact of climate change in North America has been subject to much speculation, multiple studies have suggested that increasing temperatures has had an impact on the abundance and survival rates of ticks by making previously uninhabitable territory habitable.^{1,2,3}

These changes could present a new and increasing threat of tick-borne disease to livestock, companion animals, and humans in areas where they were previously unknown or were of minor importance.⁴ Although it is the role of public health to monitor these trends, and develop management strategies, healthcare providers for both humans and animals play an important role in providing education on prevention.^{2,5}

This prevention can include personal protective measures, vaccination, tick prevention products and providing education for clients on how to check for/remove ticks on themselves and their animals.² In addition, clinicians such as veterinarians are key for the early detection and management of these illnesses.

For most tick-borne disease, prevention, early diagnosis, and treatment are the most effective ways to reduce serious clinical outcomes.²

Vector-borne disease is a One Health issue, the integrative effort of multiple disciplines working locally, nationally, and globally to attain optimal health for people, animals, and the environment.⁶ Veterinarians have a very important role in One Health, as animals share our susceptibility to some disease and can serve as early warning signs of potential human illness. Therefore, by protecting the health and safety of animals, veterinarians are also protecting the health of people.

The shift in habitable territory for ticks is generally towards higher latitudes



and higher elevations.¹ A recent study into the possible spatial-temporal changes in Lyme disease risk due to climate change provided evidence that climate change has facilitated the northward expansion of black-legged tick populations in Ontario.³ The results of this study demonstrated that while northern Ontario has been consistently unsustainable for ticks, there are now regions between southern and northern Ontario where tick sustainability has changed. This includes regions within the Niagara Escarpment and the Madawaska Highlands of Algonquin Provincial Park.³ In addition to the shift in habitable territory, rising temperature has also led to improved conditions for the survival and reproduction of ticks. This may result in longer seasonal activity and increased tick abundance.²

Although Lyme disease is the most well-known tick-borne disease, there are other tick-borne diseases in Canada that are also anticipated to increase because of climate change. These are Anaplasmosis, Ehrlichia, Babesiosis, and Borrelia Miyamoto disease.² Therefore, in anticipation of this increase of ticks and therefore, tick-borne diseases in Canada, veterinarians need to be aware that their patients now may be at an increased risk

and should educate their clients on how they can best protect their animals.²

References

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If a veterinarian is obtaining client consent to share an animal's case story, be sure the client understands and agrees to what information will be shared. Consent from clients can be verbal or written. If a veterinarian chooses to get verbal consent, it should be documented in the patient record that consent was obtained. Posting pet photos or case stories on a clinic's website or social media should not be used as testimonials.

When someone posts a negative review on social media or a third-party review site, a suggestion is to move the conversation off-line by asking the individual to contact the practice directly. The College has no regulatory authority over third-party websites. To remove a negative review, contact the third-party review site, or seek legal advice depending on the circumstances.

ETHICS RESOURCES HUB

VISIT CVO.ORG/HUB FOR GUIDANCE WITH YOUR ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Moral conflicts arise in daily practice - even in the most challenging ethical issue, a veterinarian must decide on the course of action that will best address the situation. Throughout the [Ethics Resource Hub](#), you will find online resources, including [tools and frameworks](#), [discussions](#), [case scenarios](#) and a [library](#), to assist you in building your skills in ethical decision-making.

For further information:

- [Ethics Resource Hub](#)
- [Ethics E-Learning Module](#)

Even when they are off duty, a veterinarian's conduct can still affect their reputation, the reputation of their workplace, and the profession. It is important to apply the principles above when posting on social media outside of the workplace context.

We are all aware of examples of situations when a controversial post has gone viral. Things can quickly spiral out of a person's control and be picked up by the broader media. Before posting something that may seem questionable, ask yourself if you would want it to be viewed by your boss, your clients, or shared with media outlets. Be proactive by putting practices in place for you and your veterinary team about social media use that will uphold professionalism and the public trust.

References:

- [Guidance on the Use of Social Media](#)
- [Code of Ethics](#)



AVAILABLE ONLINE



Veterinary Facility Accreditation Emblem

The College's facility accreditation program supports safe patient care. All facilities where veterinary medicine is practised in Ontario must meet the accreditation standards established by the College.

The College offers veterinary facilities the use of a facility accreditation emblem and window decal to demonstrate to the public they are committed to veterinary health care, meet the accreditation requirements and support the College's inspection program.

The emblem may be displayed on your facility's website, and on your clinic's social media sites. The emblem is also available as a window decal. More than 1,500 decals have been circulated to veterinary facilities.

The social media and website emblem and window decal are available upon request by [contacting the College](#) or submit your request online at cvo.org/getemblem.



College of Veterinarians of Ontario

2106 Gordon Street, Guelph, ON N1L 1G6
Phone: (519) 824-5600 | Toll-free: 1-800-424-2856
Fax: (519) 824-6497 | Toll-free fax: 1-888-662-9479
inquiries@cvo.org

Editor:

Jan Robinson

Assistant to the Editor:
Kim Huson

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