



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARD

Telemedicine

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Introduction¹

Advancements in communication and information technology provide opportunities for new approaches to the delivery of veterinary medicine. As the broader world of telehealth continues to expand, the College recognizes the value of utilizing developments in technology to improve access to the provision of veterinary medicine, where appropriate, and supports innovations in the delivery of veterinary services.

In all circumstances, an individual practising veterinary medicine in Ontario must be licensed with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario. This standard should not be construed to alter the scope of practice of any veterinarian or authorize the delivery of veterinary medicine in a manner not otherwise authorized by legislation. This standard supports a consistent standard of care and scope of practice notwithstanding whether the tools of delivery are physically or virtually based. For clarity, a veterinarian using telemedicine technologies in the provision of veterinary services to a patient (whether existing or new) must take appropriate steps to establish the veterinarian-client-patient relationship and conduct all appropriate evaluations and history of the patient consistent with traditional standards of care for the particular presentation. As such, some situations and patient presentations are appropriate for the utilization of telemedicine technologies as a component of, or in lieu of, in-person provision of medical care, while others are not.

¹ Introduction adapted from the Federation of State Medical Boards' Model Policy for the Appropriate Use of Telemedicine Technologies in the Practice of Medicine

The College has developed this standard to educate licensed members as to the appropriate use of telemedicine technologies in the practice of veterinary medicine. The College is committed to assuring patient and client access to the convenience and benefits offered by telemedicine technologies, while promoting the responsible practice of veterinary medicine by veterinarians.

Definitions²

Telemedicine: Telemedicine is the provision of specific veterinary medical advice and veterinary treatment of an animal(s) based on the remote diagnosis of disease and injury by means of telecommunications technology where no physical examination of the animal(s) by the veterinarian takes place. It does not include consultation between veterinarians where colleagues in different physical locations consult remotely with each other or the provision of general, non-specific, advice.

Telehealth: Telehealth is the overarching term that encompasses all uses of technology geared to remotely deliver health information, education or care remotely. Telehealth includes a broad variety of technology and tactics to deliver virtual medicine, health and education services. Telehealth is not a specific service, but a collection of tools which allow veterinarians to enhance care and education delivery. Telehealth encompasses both telemedicine and general advice.

Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine when he/she:

1. Understands that a veterinarian-client-patient relationship is established via telemedicine meeting the same expectations as when the relationship is established in-person.
2. Understands that practising veterinary medicine via telemedicine is only permitted in the context of a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship.
3. Understands that telemedicine is a method or mode of delivering veterinary medicine, rather than a new model of practice. Further, a veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations are not altered when veterinary medicine is provided via telemedicine.
4. Employs sound professional judgment to determine whether using telemedicine is appropriate in particular circumstances each and every time he or she considers practising via telemedicine, and only provides advice via telemedicine to the extent that it is possible without a physical examination. In doing so, a veterinarian must consider whether practising via telemedicine will enable him or her to satisfy all relevant and applicable legal and professional obligations, and meet the expected standard of care in any specific case. He or she does not

² Working definitions taken from the benchmark created by the Innovation and Technology Advisory Group of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario

substitute telemedicine technology for a physical examination when a physical examination is necessary, and where he or she could not thereby make an appropriate diagnosis or create a treatment plan.

5. Accepts that he or she cannot prescribe drugs when practising via telemedicine alone, unless the veterinarian has recent and sufficient knowledge of the animal or group of animals by virtue of a history and inquiry and either physical examination of the animal(s) or groups of animals or medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal or group of animals is kept to reach at least a general or preliminary diagnosis.

6. Practises veterinary medicine via telemedicine only in association with an accredited facility.

7. Ensures that the client is aware of the veterinarian's location, licensure status and the privacy and security issues involved in accessing veterinary care via telemedicine.

8. Ensures that he or she safeguards a client's privacy when practising via telemedicine by taking appropriate precautions and confirming that the technology and physical setting being used by the veterinarian and client have adequate security protocols in place to ensure compliance with the veterinarian's legal and professional obligations to protect clients' privacy and confidentiality.

9. Ensures that the technology used with respect to practice via telemedicine is of sufficient and appropriate quality to ensure the accuracy of remote assessment.

10. Ensures that information that is collected when a veterinarian practises via telemedicine becomes a part of the medical record. Maintains all applicable aspects of record keeping, outlined in the College's regulations and standards.

Legislative Authority

Veterinarians Act, R.S.O. 1990

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: General (*Veterinarians Act*)

Other References

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

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine

Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records

Professional Practice Standard: The Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

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

Professional Practice Standard: Delegation

Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent

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.