

Standards and the Role of the Regulator

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Introduction

Use of the term ‘standard’ is common within the regulated professions. This makes sense, as regulatory bodies, like the College, are responsible for setting standards related to professional practice, ethics, and conduct.

Unfortunately, common use of the term ‘standard’ by the general public and the profession, also often creates an unintended association between the College and the term ‘gold standard’.

‘Gold standard’ refers to the provision of care to animals that is technologically advanced and based on the most current evidence related to diagnostics and treatment. The term “gold standard” has a rightful place in academia and research and it can assist veterinary teams in determining a spectrum of care options available to their patients and clients. ‘Gold standard’, however, is not the same as a regulatory standard.

Given this confusion, the following document has been developed to explain the differences between the terms ‘standard of practice’, ‘standard of care’, and ‘clinical practice guidelines’ and, in particular, emphasize that the College sets and upholds standards of practice, not the “gold standard”.



What is a Standard?

A standard is a benchmark for expected behaviour and/or action that is generally accepted within a particular sector, including professions.

What Types of Standards Apply to the Practice of Veterinary Medicine in Ontario?

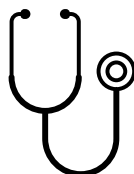
There are two main types of standards that members will encounter in their practice:

1. standard of practice; and
2. standard of care.

Shared characteristics include:

- developed and amended as needed to reflect modern practice;
- designed to serve as a benchmark for practice;
- applicable to a member's practise; and
- considered in the review of a member's practice.

It is important to note that, while they share similar characteristics, standard of practice and standard of care are fundamentally two separate concepts.



Standard of Practice

Relevant to: Professional; Essential Expectations; Public Protection

Standard of practice refers to both the published and unpublished current standards of a profession, including a compilation of the College's published policies, peer reviewed literature, clinical guidelines, and generally accepted expectations of peers. Standards of practice evolve over time to reflect current expectations. Examples of a standard of practice include expectations related to the veterinarian-client-patient relationship, informed client consent, medical recordkeeping, prescribing and dispensing, and telemedicine.



Professional misconduct occurs due to a breach of a standard of practice. The College investigates such breaches and determines measures required to ensure future compliance in managing and governing the profession in the public interest.



Standard of Care

Relevant to: Civil law; Duty of Care; Harm; Monetary Compensation

Standard of care is a civil law concept that arises in negligence actions, such as lawsuits in civil court where a claimant is seeking monetary damages. To successfully sue, a claimant must prove the member owed a duty of care to the claimant, the member breached the duty of care, and the breach caused the claimant to suffer recoverable loss. The standard of care becomes relevant after a duty of care is established. Standard of care explains what is reasonable in the circumstances and can be described as the “degree of care” (i.e., watchfulness, attention, caution, and prudence) that a reasonable veterinarian should exercise under the circumstances. If a court finds a member owed a duty of care to a client, breached that duty of care by falling below the required standard or degree of care, and the breach caused harm, then the court will find that the member engaged in “negligence” and may order monetary damages against the member.

The College is not involved in any civil procedure related to the standard of care. The College cannot award monetary damages for any harm caused by a member’s practice.

For more information related to the difference between standard of practice vs. standard of care, please refer to the Appendix.

The Connection between Standard of Practice and the College’s Professional Practice Standards

The College presents standards of practice as Professional Practice Standards which state the generally accepted expectations of a member which the profession views as essential to competent, ethical practice. Professional Practice Standards are developed by College Council, with input from public consultation and topic-specific advisory groups. Professional Practice Standards reflect the current values of the veterinary profession and are updated as practice evolves over time.



Professional Practice Standards apply to all members of the veterinary profession. They provide guidance and act as yardsticks against which professional conduct can be evaluated. Professional Practice Standards are essential instruments in the toolbox of all regulated professions.

Professional Practice Standards are a useful reference for veterinary teams to quickly determine what the essential professional expectations are in various situations. Since Professional Practice Standards are outcomes-based, not rules-based, they provide members with clarity about their broad professional expectations, while leaving it to the professional to decide *how* the standard is best met.

Professional Practice Standards are also educational for the public to help them understand the essential professional expectations for the veterinary profession as well as how profession-based regulation works.

How does the College use Professional Practice Standards?

Professional Practice Standards are the backbone upon which a variety of programs and resources are based and are instrumental to the College's role. Professional Practice Standards shape the College's work including:

- Quality assurance;
- Professional misconduct;
- Supplementary policies and resources;
- Practice Advisory Service; and
- Guidance to the profession.

Are Clinical Practice Guidelines the same as Professional Practice Standards?

Clinical practice guidelines may be referenced in the development of Professional Practice Standards, but they are not the same. The College does not have a role in the development of clinical practice guidelines. Clinical practice guidelines are developed by the profession, usually within research and academic communities, and relate to specific areas of clinical practice in veterinary medicine.

Where are Professional Practice Standards Published?










Professional Practice Standards are available on the College's website. Members are encouraged to review this section of the College's website frequently to ensure that they remain current.



Conclusion

There are key differences between the terms “standard of practice”, “standard of care” and “clinical practice guidelines”. These differences require consideration to ensure consistent interpretation and understanding. Understanding that standards of practice are set by the College are not “gold standard” assists members to have confidence in their choices and use of their professional judgement.

Appendix – Standard of Practice vs. Standard of Care

Characteristic	Standard of Practice	Standard of Care
Applicable to practice of veterinary medicine		
Considered in the review of a veterinarian's practise		
Used in the review of a veterinarian's professional conduct		
Outlines essential professional expectations for all veterinarians		
Overseen by the College		
Overseen by the Courts		
Awards monetary damages		