



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

GUIDE TO THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARD

Telemedicine

Published: May 2016

Revised: November 2017

Introduction

The College's Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine establishes the expectations that are fundamental to practicing veterinary medicine electronically via telemedicine. Telemedicine is a method of delivering veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies, such as video chat, when the veterinarian and animal being treated are in different physical locations. Using a question and answer format, this Guide to the Professional Practice Standard addresses questions and offers suggestions on how to apply the Professional Practice Standard in situations that arise in veterinary practice.

Frequently Asked Questions About What Constitutes Telemedicine

What does practising via telemedicine mean?

Practising via telemedicine refers to delivering veterinary medicine at a distance using telecommunication technology. It is a *method* or *mode* of delivering veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies, such as video chat, when the veterinarian and animal being treated are in different physical locations. Practising via telemedicine does not alter a veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations.

Does telemedicine include consultation between veterinarians?

The College's chosen definition of telemedicine does not include teleconsultation, in which colleagues in different physical locations consult remotely with each other. The reasoning is that, in cases of teleconsultation, professional obligations and responsibilities remain with the licensed member who is in an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR)

What are the expectations of a veterinarian when utilizing telemedicine exclusively?

A veterinarian can practice exclusively via telemedicine from an accredited facility and can establish a VCPR via telemedicine. He or she must inform the client about the scope of services that are available via telemedicine; the services are limited due to the veterinarian's inability to perform a physical examination or prescribe drugs.

Where is the practice of telemedicine occurring when a veterinarian and an animal are not in the same location?

It is the policy of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario that professional services are rendered where the Ontario animal(s) is located. All veterinarians who are treating Ontario animal(s), groups of animals, or herd(s) must be licensed in Ontario.

Veterinarians who treat Ontario animals, groups of animals, or herds without an Ontario licence are engaged in unauthorized practice.

What are some examples of the appropriate use of telemedicine?

- A family on vacation consults with their veterinarian with whom they have a VCPR about an issue related to their pet's diabetes that the veterinarian has been treating. The veterinarian determines that he or she can consult about the condition without a physical examination, because one was performed recently
- A family skypes with their veterinarian to confer about a follow-up question after a recent onsite appointment
- A veterinarian consults with a client in a remote region via e-mail, inclusive of digital photographs.
- A food producer consults a veterinarian via video chat about a potential skin condition in a herd

Frequently Asked Questions About Determining When Telemedicine is Appropriate

Does service to a remote area require a valid and pre-existing VCPR if a client cannot get to a veterinarian in time?

There are exceptions to the need to establish a VCPR prior to providing veterinary medicine, including situations where a veterinarian, acting reasonably and with evidence, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services.

Frequently Asked Questions About Practising Via Telemedicine

Does a veterinarian have to work from an accredited facility to practice via telemedicine?

Yes. A veterinarian licensed in Ontario must work from an accredited facility to practice veterinary medicine. This is no different when practicing via telemedicine. The veterinarian can be the owner or an associate at an accredited hospital, mobile, or office that offers telemedicine services. Veterinarians do not have to be physically present at the accredited facility to provide telemedicine service, although they can be.

A veterinarian may also open a new practice that exclusively provides telemedicine

services. They would need to apply to the College to become accredited as an office.

How often should a veterinarian see an animal, group of animals, or herd in person when practising via telemedicine?

The appropriate timelines of visits will depend on the circumstances of a case and on the VCPR.

Can a veterinarian work with a third-party company that provides a software or web interface which offers virtual access to veterinary services?

Yes. Third-party companies may offer and provide services to veterinarians that facilitate public access to veterinary services. Veterinarians should ensure that third-party companies are allowing the public to choose their veterinarian and should not be involved in a system of steering. Veterinary service must be provided by veterinarians only and veterinarians must be affiliated with an accredited facility. A third party company is not an accredited facility.

How will clients know who is responding to a query via telemedicine?

A veterinarian should always clearly identify himself or herself and indicate his or her location and accredited facility name to the client as an assurance of the veterinarian's identity. He or she should indicate that this information is verifiable on the public register.

When should veterinarians respond to queries made via telemedicine?

Telemedicine is merely a mode of delivering veterinary medicine. Practising via telemedicine does not change a veterinarian's existing professional obligations to provide guidance to clients on what is necessary to provide safe, quality animal care.

Is it permissible to bill clients for services that are provided via telemedicine?

Veterinarians can bill for services provided via telemedicine when they feel that it would be appropriate to do so.

What are the medical record requirements when practising via telemedicine?

A veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations are not altered when veterinary services are provided via telemedicine. This includes the requirement to keep accurate and complete medical records which should be kept at the accredited facility that the veterinarian is associated with. Veterinarians should adhere to the medical records requirements required by Regulation 1093 and College policy when providing veterinary medicine via telemedicine. A veterinarian should make a note that a service was provided via telemedicine if he or she also offers services in-person. Following a telemedicine encounter, the veterinarian should transfer medical records to a client's usual veterinarian, if applicable.

Legislative Authority

Veterinarians Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. V.3 and R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: GENERAL

Other References

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

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: 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.