Introduction

The veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is one of the foundations of effective veterinary care and service. A VCPR is created when a veterinarian agrees with a client to provide veterinary services to an animal(s) or a group of animals or herd(s), and the veterinarian has met all the expectations for the establishment and maintenance of a VCPR.

A VCPR must exist before a veterinarian recommends or provides any veterinary services (including prescribing, dispensing, or administering drugs) for any animal(s) or groups of animals or herd(s). Veterinarians must ensure that they meet the expectations regarding the proper procedures 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.
Groups 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 client’s facility 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 valid VCPR prior to recommending and/or providing treatment or veterinary services (including the prescribing, dispensing, or administering of drugs) for any animal(s), groups of companion animals, or herd(s).

2. Understands that a valid VCPR only exists when the veterinarian:
   - Has been retained by the owner of the animal(s), groups of animals, or herd(s), an authorized representative of the owner, or an individual who the member reasonably determines is acting in the interest of the animal(s), groups of animals, or herd(s);
   - Has advised the client that services will only be provided in accordance with the standards of practice of the profession; and
   - Has reached an agreement with the client as to the scope of the services to be provided by the member.

3. Obtains the client’s informed consent for each service or group of services to be provided.

4. Maintains sufficient and recent knowledge of the animal(s), groups of animals, or herd(s) to make a diagnosis. Recent and sufficient is a matter of the professional judgment of the veterinarian in the individual case. When prescribing, administering, or dispensing a drug, sufficient and recent knowledge is a matter of a relevant history and inquiry and either a 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 are kept.

5. Ensures that he or she is readily available in case of 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 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.

Other considerations: Exemptions and Exceptions to the VCPR Requirement

Dispensing Exemptions
Despite a lack of VCPR, a veterinarian may:
(a) fill or re-fill a prescription (other than for a controlled substance):
   - that was issued by another veterinarian where it is not reasonably possible for the client to obtain the drug from the prescribing veterinarian;
   - where it is necessary in the animal’s interests to dispense without delay;
   - where the veterinarian made a reasonable effort to discuss the matter with the prescribing veterinarian;
   - 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 the member makes a written record of the transaction.

(b) dispense 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.

Exceptions to the Requirement for a VCPR:
Exceptions to the requirement that a valid 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:
- Acting reasonably, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services;
- 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;
- Is providing veterinary services in or from a temporary facility;¹

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.
• 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*; or
• 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.

**Legislative Authority**

R.R.O. 1990, Reg. 1093: GENERAL, ss 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](http://www.cvo.org):

- 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
- Position Statement: Cardiac Screening Programs
- Position Statement: Conducting Programs for the Implantation of Electronic Identification Devices in Companion Animals
- Position Statement: Congenital Deafness Screening Programs for Companion Animals
- Position Statement: Ophthalmic Screening Program
- Position Statement: Temporary Emergency Facilities
- Policy Statement: After-Hours Care