



# College of Veterinarians of British Columbia

## *Professional Practice Standard: the Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*

Published October 2018

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This College publication describes a mandatory standard of practice. The *Veterinarians Act* in section 52 provides that a failure to comply with a standard may be investigated.

### **Preamble**

The veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is one of the foundations of effective veterinary care and service.

A current and legitimate VCPR must exist before a veterinarian recommends or provides veterinary services (including prescribing, dispensing, or administering drugs) for any animal or group of animals or herd, unless one of the listed exceptions applies. Veterinarians must ensure that they meet the Practice Expectations for establishing, maintaining, and terminating a VCPR.

### **Definitions**

**Client:** means either:

- the owner of an animal, group of animals, or herd(s);
- an authorized representative of the owner; or
- an individual acting in the interest of the animal(s)

based on the information available to the veterinarian.

**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 where the herd is maintained and discussions with the client, he or she must acquire and maintain a current understanding of the level of husbandry practised on the premises, and of the client's abilities with respect to recognizing signs of disease and administering drugs and treatment plans.

**Group of Animals:** veterinarians may use a herd-health model to provide services to other groups of animals (such as at shelters or with breeders). Through visits to the premises where the group of animals is kept 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 of drugs and treatment plans

## Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship when he/she:

1. Establishes a VCPR prior to recommending and/or providing treatment or veterinary services (including the prescribing, dispensing, or administering of drugs) for any animal, group or animals, or herd.
2. Reaches an agreement with the client as to the scope of services to be provided by the veterinarian and advises the client that services will only be provided in accordance with the CVBC's bylaws and Professional Practice Standards.
3. Understands that a legitimate VCPR is established and maintained only when:
  - a. The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making clinical assessments and recommendations regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment;
  - b. The client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's recommendations and prescriptions;
  - c. The veterinarian has recent and sufficient knowledge of the animal or group of animals or herd on which to base the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of the medical condition of the animal(s). What constitutes "recent and sufficient knowledge" is a matter of the professional judgement of the veterinarian in the individual case. When making an assessment, diagnosis, or prescribing, administering or dispensing a drug, recent and sufficient knowledge is a matter of
    - i. History and inquiry, and
    - ii. Physical examination of the animal or group of animals, OR medically-appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal or group of animals are keptto reach at least a general or preliminary diagnosis.
  - d. The veterinarian ensures that he/she is readily available in case of an adverse reaction to a drug or a failure of treatment, or has made reasonable arrangements for follow-up evaluation and care with another veterinarian.
4. Provides a client with adequate notice of the termination of the VCPR, allowing the client a reasonable amount of time in which 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.

## Exceptions to the Requirement for a VCPR

Exceptions to the requirement that a legitimate 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:

- (a) Acting reasonably, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services;
- (b) Is an employee in British Columbia by the Crown in right of Canada or by the Province of British Columbia or other similar employment, and is providing veterinary services within the scope of that employment or contractual relationship;

- (c) Is providing veterinary services that are permitted or required under any Act other than the *Veterinarians Act*;
- (d) Is retained or employed by a person other than the animal's owner to conduct an independent examination of the animal and report on the animal's health to that person; or
- (e) Administers or dispenses a drug pursuant to a prescription (other than for a controlled substance):
  - that was issued by another Canadian registrant,
  - where it is not reasonably possible for the client to obtain the drug from the prescribing member or from a human pharmacy;
  - where there are exceptional and extenuating circumstances and it is in the best interest of the patient to dispense without delay;
  - where the veterinarian has confirmed the registration status and facility affiliation of the prescribing veterinarian;
  - where the veterinarian has made reasonable efforts 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 veterinarian makes a written record of the transaction.

These exceptions to the requirement for a VCPR in no way preclude the veterinarian from taking whatever steps he or she may deem necessary to confirm the appropriateness and safety of dispensing the prescribed medication to the animal in question, including but not limited to the performance of a physical exam and review of the medical records.

### **Legislative Authority**

*Veterinarians Act*, SBC 2010, Duty and Objects, s. 3(2)(b)

### **Guide to the Professional Practice Standard**

A separate "Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship" that includes "Frequently Asked Questions" is in development and will be available in the near future, to assist in the interpretation and application of this Professional Practice Standard.

### **Acknowledgement**

Adapted with permission from the CVO's "Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship."