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Veterinarians and “Over-the-Counter” Medications

The College continues to receive inquiries from veterinarians advising that members of the public are approaching them to purchase various products, particularly flea and heartworm products, over-the-counter.

Many of these products are termed “ethical drugs”. An ethical drug is a drug that in accordance with Federal Legislation does not require a prescription, but that is generally prescribed by a medical practitioner. Despite this control, many of these drugs have found their way to the retail market.

As well, a pharmaceutical company recently distributed information to veterinarians regarding the non-prescription status of some drug products, indicating that the drugs could be dispensed “over-the-counter”.

The College wishes to emphasize that there is simply no such thing as an over-the-counter drug in a veterinary practice in Ontario. The dispensing of any drug product to anyone with whom the veterinarian does not have a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is professional misconduct. While it may or may not be legal for a retail establishment to sell these drugs, veterinary clinics are not retail establishments; veterinarians provide professional services and are expected to conduct themselves accordingly.