

**The College of
Veterinarians of Ontario**

Position Statement

Terminating the Veterinarian–Client–Patient Relationship

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Terminating the Veterinarian–Client–Patient Relationship

Approved by Council: November 8, 2006

Publication Date: December 2006

To be reviewed by: February 2012

Key Words: veterinarian-client-patient relationship,
termination, medical records, continuing animal
care

Related Topics: Transfer of Medical Records

Legislative References: *Veterinarians Act*, Ontario Regulation 1093
subsections 17.(1) 4 and 17.(1) 5

College Contact: Complaints Coordinator

Reference Materials:

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Purpose

The purpose of this position statement is to guide veterinarians on the proper procedures for terminating a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) while ensuring responsible and continuous animal care.

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their animals and practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with professional practice leaders 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.

Scope

This position statement applies to all veterinary practitioners.

Relevant Legislation

Subsection 17. (1) 4 of Ontario Regulation 1093 states that professional misconduct includes **failing to continue to provide professional services to an animal until the services are no longer required or until the client has had a reasonable opportunity to arrange for the services of another member.**

Subsection 17. (1) 5 of Ontario Regulation 1093 states professional misconduct also includes **failing to provide within a reasonable time and without cause any certificate or report requested by a client or his or her agent in respect to an examination or treatment performed by the member.**

Background

The veterinarian–client–patient relationship is the foundation of effective veterinary medicine and animal care. The College of Veterinarians of Ontario recognizes that, in certain situations, a relationship does not work. In the interests of optimal animal care and treatment, termination is periodically the most productive option for addressing on-going issues.

Terminating the Veterinarian–Client–Patient Relationship

Potential reasons for terminating relationships are many and can include a client's persistent non-adherence to proper treatment plans resulting in potential threats to the welfare of the animal, a difference in philosophy as to the approach on diagnosing and treating animals, verbally abusive and threatening behaviour towards the practitioner and/or hospital staff placing unreasonable demands such as requests for unnecessary medications and services, demanding illegal or unethical actions (e.g. asking the veterinarian to alter a medical record), or non-payment of fees.¹

After determining that the veterinarian-client-patient relationship should not continue, the following process should be followed by the practitioner to ensure the best interests of all parties involved.

The client should be provided with a written notice, delivered by courier, registered mail or by hand, confirming the end of the relationship. The reasons for the termination need not be clearly specified. A sample termination letter is included in Appendix 1.

To ensure compliance with subsection 17. (1) 4 of Ontario Regulation 1093, a client must be provided with proper notice of the termination and allowed a "reasonable opportunity" to arrange for care with another practitioner.

A reasonable opportunity to secure a new practitioner varies with the circumstances (e.g. nature of the client and his or her history, reasons for the termination, available alternatives, or whether assistance is provided in locating other services) and may be dependent upon the location of the veterinary facility. In rural or remote areas, the time required to obtain a new practitioner is anticipated to be longer than an urban area. Where the reason for termination is abusive behaviour towards a veterinarian or staff, or genuine safety concerns, the reasonable opportunity might be brief.

Practitioners should designate a period of time for which they will provide emergency services. The time of termination should be clearly stated to the client in the termination letter.

The practitioner must also ensure the appropriate transfer of medical records and other relevant information. Subsection 17. (1) 5 of Ontario Regulation 1093 specifies that professional misconduct includes "failing to provide within a reasonable time and without cause any certificate or report requested by a client

¹ While the College generally does not expect a veterinarian to continue a relationship that has broken down, the College also expects that practitioners will not terminate a relationship for an unprofessional reason (e.g. discrimination under the *Ontario Human Rights Code*).

or his or her agent in respect to an examination or treatment performed by the member.” The termination letter should ensure the client is aware that all relevant information will be promptly forwarded when a new practitioner is secured or, it may be possible to include a copy of the medical records with the termination letter.

APPENDIX 1 – SAMPLE TERMINATION LETTER

Date

Dear:

This letter will advise you that as of (dd/mm/yyyy), staff and I at our office will not be able to provide care to your animals. After that date, no general or emergency services will be provided.

It is advisable to seek an alternative veterinary facility, and once you have selected one, please have them contact us and we will forward all medical records and relevant information immediately (alternative – please find enclosed a copy of your medical records).

We wish you all the best in your future animal health matters.

Sincerely,

, DVM