

Telemedicine

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Introduction

The College's *Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine* establishes the expectations that are fundamental to practising veterinary medicine via telemedicine in Ontario. 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.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
General Overview of Telemedicine	4
1. What is telemedicine?	4
2. Does practicing via telemedicine include consultation between veterinarians?.....	4
3. Does practicing via telemedicine include providing general information or education to an individual using electronic means?.....	4
4. Does practicing via telemedicine include triage?.....	4
5. What types of veterinary services can be offered via telemedicine?	4
Licensing and Accreditation	5
6. Is a veterinarian required to be licensed with the College in order to provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario?	5
7. Is a veterinarian licensed with the College permitted to provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located outside of Ontario?.....	5
8. Does a veterinarian offering veterinary services to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario have to practice from an accredited facility in Ontario?.....	5
9. Can a veterinarian practice from an accredited facility in Ontario that is limited to providing only telemedicine services?	5
10. Can a veterinarian utilize a third-party company platform to provide veterinary services via telemedicine?.....	6
Prescribing	6
11. Can a veterinarian prescribe a drug via telemedicine?.....	6
12. Can a veterinarian prescribe a drug when they obtain recent and sufficient knowledge of the patient(s) via telemedicine where no in-person physical examination or in-person premise visit has previously been conducted?	6
Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)	6
13. In order to practice via telemedicine, does a veterinarian need to first establish a VCPR in-person?.....	6



Client Communications and Recordkeeping	7
14. What is a veterinarian expected to communicate to their client(s) when practicing via telemedicine?.....	7
15. What are the medical record requirements when practising via telemedicine?	7
16. What privacy legislation needs to be followed when practising via telemedicine?	7
17. If a veterinarian is using a third-party company's platform to practise via telemedicine, where should the medical records be stored?	8
Practising via Telemedicine	8
18. Can a veterinarian charge a fee for services that are provided via telemedicine?.....	8
19. Can telemedicine be used for the provision of after-hours care services?.....	8
20. Can a veterinarian delegate a task to an auxiliary while practising via telemedicine?	8
Legislative Authority	9
Resources	9



General Overview of Telemedicine

1. What is telemedicine?

Telemedicine refers to the provision of specific veterinary medical advice and veterinary treatment of an animal(s) or group of animals based on a virtual assessment by means of telecommunication technology where no in-person physical examination or in-person premise visit of the animal(s) or group of animals by the veterinarian takes place. Practicing via telemedicine does not alter a veterinarian's existing legal and/or professional obligations.

2. Does practicing via telemedicine include consultation between veterinarians?

Telemedicine does not include teleconsultation between veterinarians where colleagues in different physical locations consult virtually with each other. In cases of teleconsultation, legal and/or professional obligations remain with the veterinarian who established the veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR).

3. Does practicing via telemedicine include providing general information or education to an individual using electronic means?

If a veterinarian is providing general advice to an individual that is not specific to their animal and could be applied to many animals, this is not considered practising via telemedicine. This would be considered telehealth, which encompasses both telemedicine and general advice. To review the full definition of telehealth, please refer to the *Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine*.

4. Does practicing via telemedicine include triage?

In Ontario, triage is considered specific veterinary medical advice and falls under the practice of veterinary medicine. When triage is provided using electronic means (i.e. teletriage), it is a component of practicing via telemedicine.

A veterinarian's legal and professional obligations are unchanged whether triage is performed in-person or using electronic means.

5. What types of veterinary services can be offered via telemedicine?

Telemedicine is a method or mode of delivering veterinary medicine. A veterinarian uses professional judgement to determine what services to provide via telemedicine, in accordance with the relevant legislation and College standards. A veterinarian provides services via telemedicine to the extent that

[Back to Top](#)



is possible without an in-person examination or in-person premise visit.

Licensing and Accreditation

6. Is a veterinarian required to be licensed with the College in order to provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario?

All veterinarians who provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario must be licensed with the College regardless of the location of the veterinarian.

7. Is a veterinarian licensed with the College permitted to provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located outside of Ontario?

A veterinarian licensed in Ontario providing veterinary services to an animal(s) or group of animals who resides outside of Ontario would need to meet the regulatory requirements of the jurisdiction where the animal resides.

The College maintains its regulatory authority to investigate any complaints made about a veterinarian licensed in Ontario regardless of whether the veterinarian and/or the animal(s) or group of animals is physically located in Ontario.

8. Does a veterinarian offering veterinary services to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario have to practice from an accredited facility in Ontario?

All veterinarians who provide veterinary services via telemedicine to an animal(s) or group of animals located in Ontario must be working at or from an accredited facility in Ontario. The veterinarian does not have to be physically present at the accredited facility in order to provide services.

9. Can a veterinarian practice from an accredited facility in Ontario that is limited to providing only telemedicine services?

Yes. For more information related to these requirements please contact the College's accreditation team.

[Back to Top](#)



10. Can a veterinarian utilize a third-party company platform to provide veterinary services via telemedicine?

A veterinarian may choose to utilize a third-party company's platform to connect with clients in order to deliver veterinary services via telemedicine when practicing from an accredited facility. The platform is a conduit or interface between the client and the veterinarian and is not in itself an accredited facility. The veterinarian is solely responsible for the services provided via telemedicine, including collecting fees from clients for these services and medical record-keeping.

Third-party providers of software (who are non-veterinarians) that assist veterinarians in providing telemedicine services should not hold themselves out as providing veterinary telemedicine services to the public. For more information, please see the *Professional Practice Standard: Conflicts of Interest in the Practice of Veterinary Medicine* and the *Position Statement: Unauthorized Practice*.

Prescribing

11. Can a veterinarian prescribe a drug via telemedicine?

A veterinarian is permitted to prescribe a drug for an animal(s) or group of animal(s) via telemedicine. The professional expectations related to this allowance are outlined in the *Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug* and are repeated in the *Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine*.

12. Can a veterinarian prescribe a drug when they obtain recent and sufficient knowledge of the patient(s) via telemedicine where no in-person physical examination or in-person premise visit has previously been conducted?

There are specific circumstances where a veterinarian is permitted to prescribe a non-controlled drug to an animal(s) or group of animals for an immediate, short-term need when they have obtained recent and sufficient knowledge through a virtual examination or premise visit. The professional expectations related to this allowance are outlined in the *Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug* and are repeated in the *Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine*.

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

13. In order to practice via telemedicine, does a veterinarian need to first establish a VCPR in-person?

Veterinarians are permitted to establish a VCPR without an in-person physical examination or in-

[Back to Top](#)



person premise visit. This can include use of different technologies including, but not limited to, telephone and video teleconference. A VCPR established in this way holds the same expectations as when the relationship is established in-person. For more information, please refer to the *Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*.

Example: Dr. Smith is working at Clinic A in Ontario and provides veterinary services via telemedicine. They receive a phone call from Susan, who is not a client. Susan recently moved to Ontario and has a concern about their dog. Dr. Smith determines that the concern can be addressed via telemedicine. Susan and Dr. Smith establish a VCPR over the phone whereby they discuss and confirm the scope of services to be provided.

Client Communications and Recordkeeping

14. What is a veterinarian expected to communicate to their client(s) when practicing via telemedicine?

A veterinarian should always clearly identify themselves. They should also;

- indicate their location and accredited facility name to their client(s) as an assurance of the veterinarian's identity;
- indicate that this information is verifiable on the College's public register; •
- ensure their client(s) know the scope of services they can provide, and how to obtain in-person care if needed;
- ensure their client(s) are aware of any relevant privacy and security issues involved in accessing veterinary care via telemedicine.

15. What are the medical record requirements when practising via telemedicine?

A veterinarian must maintain all relevant aspects of record keeping in accordance with the *Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*.

16. What privacy legislation needs to be followed when practising via telemedicine?

Veterinarians are subject to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA). This includes personal information gathered via telemedicine after obtaining client consent-

[Back to Top](#)



to collect, use or disclose the information.

A veterinarian must also ensure client confidentiality is maintained as per s. 17. (1) 6. in Regulation 1093. For more information, please refer to the Privacy in Your Practice section of the College's website.

17. If a veterinarian is using a third-party company's platform to practise via telemedicine, where should the medical records be stored?

Expectations for medical recordkeeping are not changed if a veterinarian is using a third-party company's platform to practice via telemedicine. A veterinarian is required to keep the original physical and/or electronic copy of the medical records in the accredited veterinary facility where veterinary services are provided. For more information, please see the College's *Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records* and the *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*.

Practising via Telemedicine

18. Can a veterinarian charge a fee for services that are provided via telemedicine?

A veterinarian may choose to charge a fee for services provided via telemedicine.

19. Can telemedicine be used for the provision of after-hours care services?

Telemedicine may be one option for providing after-hours care services. For more information, please see the *Policy Statement: After-Hours Care Services*.

20. Can a veterinarian delegate a task to an auxiliary while practising via telemedicine?

A veterinarian uses their professional judgment to determine when to delegate a task to an auxiliary. They must practise in accordance with the Professional Practice Standard Delegation, and any other legislation and College standards relevant to the specific circumstance.

Example: Dr. Clason, a large animal veterinarian, has a telephone consultation with a producer with whom they have previously established a VCPR. The producer informs the veterinarian that they have a cow that has a large wound on its leg. The producer provides Dr. Clason with digital pictures of the wound. Dr. Clason takes a history and reviews the pictures. They recently conducted an in-person premise visit where the cow is located. They determine that diagnostic tests are required to have

[Back to Top](#)



sufficient information to provide a diagnosis. Dr. Clason discusses this with the producer and advises that they would like to send their auxiliary to the farm today to take some samples for testing. They obtain informed client consent to proceed with the auxiliary gathering the samples under delegation and indirect supervision through one of the accredited mobiles of the practice.

Legislative Authority

R.R.O 1990, Reg 1093: General, s. 17, 22-28 (*Veterinarians Act*)

Resources

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

1. *Professional Practice Standard: Telemedicine*
2. *Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
3. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
4. *Professional Practice Standard: Prescribing a Drug*
5. *Professional Practice Standard: Conflicts of Interest in the Practice of Veterinary Medicine*
6. *Position Statement: Unauthorized Practice*
7. *Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*
8. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Medical Records*
9. *Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*
10. *Policy Statement: Ophthalmic Screening Program*
11. *Policy Statement: Congenital Deafness Screening Programs for Companion Animals*
12. *Policy Statement: Cardiac Screening Programs*
13. *Policy Statement: Conducting Programs for the Implementation of Electronic Information Devices in Companion animals*
14. *Position Statement: Temporary Emergency Facilities*

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.