

# Balancing Available Health Care Options and Client Access to Veterinary Care

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## Introduction

Veterinarians have long provided quality care to the animals of Ontario. Veterinarians recognize that each animal(s) or group of animals is unique and requires the veterinarian to use their skills, knowledge, and judgement to evaluate all presented circumstances to determine care options that are in the interest of both the animal(s) and owner(s).

Modern veterinary medicine has more options for care than ever before. Advancements in science and technology continue to expand the traditional platform of diagnostics, pharmaceuticals, and treatment. While growth in the profession has created breadth in available knowledge and skill, it has also perhaps contributed to personal expectations of perfection and the perceived need to provide a “gold standard” of care.<sup>1</sup> When coupled with evolving public expectations, the result is an increasing set of influencing factors that are driving care options for an animal(s) or group of animals and which in some cases, may be affecting reasonable access to veterinary care.

**This position is intended to highlight the paramount importance of context when a veterinarian identifies care options to a client**

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<sup>1</sup> “Gold Standard” is a term used to refer to offering only the best and most advanced forms of care which is neither a legal nor regulatory requirement.



**regarding their animal(s). Options are important to ensure access to services for clients and animals from all backgrounds. While veterinarians may provide the most innovative or advanced options, this is not a College requirement. Veterinarians are supported in offering care options along a spectrum that strikes the necessary balance between available veterinary care and access to veterinary care for animals and their owners in Ontario.**

## Definition

**Spectrum of Care:** Spectrum of Care is defined as the recognition that the care options for an animal(s) or group of animals will be influenced by many factors including the knowledge and skill of the veterinarian; the current scientific evidence regarding the safety and efficacy of available treatments; the condition of the animal(s) or group of animals; practice specific goals, culture and available resources; and the owner(s)' goals, values and resources.<sup>2</sup>

## Position

Veterinarians are animal health advocates who possess a distinct set of competencies. It is a veterinarian's responsibility to employ these qualifications in a professional and ethical manner to provide safe and competent veterinary care to the public.

The practice of veterinary medicine is complex. This complexity is intensified by the wide array of care options available for each animal(s) or group of animals. Considering available care options along a spectrum requires both the veterinarian and the client to weigh multiple, often competing, factors to determine the appropriate course of action for each case.

Council recognizes that consideration of a broad spectrum of care options is not new within a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR). Council acknowledges that choices made along a spectrum will vary depending upon circumstance and can include end-of-life decisions. Council supports and encourages all veterinarians to determine with their clients the appropriate care options for each presenting case.

Council continues to emphasize the importance of informed client consent. Practising along a spectrum of care is not about one party dictating the actions of another, and at no time should care options be offered that could result in inadequate or substandard veterinary care or negatively impact the welfare of the animal. Council encourages open and frank conversations between veterinarians and their clients, as two-way communication is essential to determining care choices that are grounded in informed decision-making.

Adaptability and flexibility in the practice of veterinary medicine is essential to ensuring that the public has continued access to safe and competent veterinary care in Ontario.

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from AVMA definition.



## Legislative Authority

*Veterinarians Act* R.S.O. 1990, c. V.3 s. 3

Ontario Regulation 1093 R.S.O. 1990 s. 19 made under the *Veterinarians Act*.

## Resources

The following can be found at the College's website at [cvo.org](http://cvo.org):

1. *Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining, and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
2. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Establishing, Maintaining, and Discontinuing a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)*
3. *Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*
4. *Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent*

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](http://www.cvo.org)) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.