



Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) – Professional Standard

Introduction

The VCPR is the foundational basis for professional interactions between veterinary professionals, clients and patients. The VCPR is vital to the provision of veterinary medical services and the health of animals. A VCPR exists when a veterinarian establishes a relationship with a client to provide veterinary medical services and has appropriate professional knowledge about the animal or group of animal(s).

The requirements for establishing a valid VCPR are each essential to providing quality veterinary medical services. The VCPR does not exist solely for purposes of policy and regulation.

Conventionally, establishing a VCPR has been viewed as a barrier or “hurdle to be cleared” before a veterinarian may provide veterinary medical services (most commonly selling drugs). It is not a barrier to providing veterinary medical services; it is the standard that must be met each time services are provided and is expected by the public and the profession.

The establishment of a valid VCPR signals the beginning of the responsibility and accountability of the veterinarian, veterinary technologist and related permit holder for a client and patient.

The veterinarian may officially terminate a VCPR to clearly communicate their intention to terminate services and cease assuming responsibility for ongoing care.

Establishing a VCPR

Veterinarians are granted an exclusive scope of practice of veterinary medicine and the veterinarian must ensure that a valid VCPR exists when veterinary medical services are provided.

Veterinarians may delegate to a veterinary technologist that is under their direction and control, the collection of information that contributes to the development of the VCPR.

Information collected by a veterinary professional through telephonic or electronic or virtual means may contribute to the development of a VCPR, however, information collected by virtual means alone is not sufficient to establish a VCPR.

The VCPR, once established, extends to other veterinary professionals and related permit holders of a specific veterinary practice entity (VPE) where medical records are accessible.

The patient is an animal or group of animals.

Requirements for Establishing a VCPR:

A VCPR exists when all of the following conditions have been met:

1. The veterinarian has assumed responsibility for making clinical assessments and recommendations regarding the health of the animal(s) and need for medical treatment
2. The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) on which to base the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of the medical condition of the animal(s). This means that the veterinarian:
 - a. is professionally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s), and
 - b. has documented relevant and timely interaction between the veterinarian, animal owner or caretaker and animal patients, which is normally by virtue of an examination of the animal(s), by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept or by both examination and visits, and
 - c. has documented medically appropriate information and knowledge about the animal(s).
3. The client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's recommendations and prescription, and
4. The veterinarian is available or has arranged for follow-up evaluation, especially in the event of adverse reactions or failure of the treatment regimen.

Related Issues

There are a number of related issues to be clarified concerning the professional standard for establishing a VCPR in veterinary practice, including:

1. Triage including teletriage
2. Telemedicine/virtual appointments
3. Extension of and established VCPR to veterinary professionals and permit holders

Triage

Triage is the determination of whether the patient requires immediate examination and treatment by a veterinarian. This may be undertaken in person at a VPE or through virtual means (telephone or videoconference).

A VCPR does not need to exist before triage is performed, since the elements to establish the VCPR, particularly "veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) on which to base the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of the medical condition of the animal(s)" cannot be reasonably met during triage.

While it is not a reasonable expectation that the veterinarian assumes responsibility for the case solely through the process of triage, there is professional responsibility of members and permit holders who provide triage services.

Information obtained during the process of triage may contribute to the development of a VCPR.

Notwithstanding that a VCPR is not established during the process of triage, members and permit holders are expected to meet the acceptable professional standard in the delivery of any veterinary medical procedures including triage.

Telemedicine/Virtual Appointments

Veterinarians or veterinary technologists may collect information by telemedicine and virtual means that contributes to the development of a VCPR. In person examination of the animal patient or group of

animals, timely site visit and/or interaction with animals and owners or caretakers are required to meet the professional expectation to establish a VCPR.

Notwithstanding the “Requirements for Establishing a VCPR,” in certain exceptional circumstances where a VCPR has not been established, a veterinarian may determine through their professional judgement that there is sufficient information obtained through telemedicine or virtual means (virtual examination of animal(s) or virtual site visit) to prescribe treatment if:

- 1) Through the virtual examination of the animal(s) or virtual site visit, the veterinarian has conducted sufficient investigation and collected sufficient information to arrive at a diagnosis and determine the medical need for a prescribed drug,
- 2) The quantity of the drug prescribed is limited to an immediate, short-term need or is the minimum amount necessary to allow the client a reasonable opportunity to obtain in-person veterinary services for the animal(s) or group of animals,
- 3) The veterinarian is readily available to manage adverse reactions to the drug or failure of the regimen of therapy,
- 4) No prescribing of controlled drugs is permitted in these circumstances, and
- 5) The veterinarian assumes responsibility and accountability for the case.

Extension of an Established VCPR to veterinary professionals and permit holders

A veterinary professional working in a VPE may continue to provide veterinary medical care for an animal patient for which medical records are available based on a valid VCPR established by another veterinarian working in that practice.

The veterinary professional will need to determine on a case-by-case basis if the VCPR remains valid.

Date Approved by Council:	November 16, 2022
Date Reviewed:	
Reviewed By:	Council
Future revision/review date:	2025