



## *Frequently Asked Questions: Guidelines for the Use of Telemedicine in Veterinary Practice*

Revised version published November 2022 (Original version published June 2021)

---

### **1. What does practising veterinary medicine via telemedicine mean?**

Practising via telemedicine refers to delivering veterinary medicine at a distance using telecommunication technology. It is a *method* or *mode* of delivering veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies, such as video chat, when the veterinarian and animal being treated are in different physical locations.

Practising via telemedicine does not alter a veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations. This includes the responsibilities engaged by a VCPR, including but not limited to medical record keeping, confidentiality and security of client and patient information, informed consent, availability and after-hours care, referral and assumption of care responsibilities, and other responsibilities established in Part 4 of the bylaws.

### **2. What are the expectations of a veterinarian when utilizing telemedicine exclusively?**

A veterinarian may practice via telemedicine (only from an accredited practice facility) and may establish a new VCPR via telemedicine if necessary, appropriate and well documented. They must inform the client about the scope and possible limitations of services that are available via telemedicine; scope of services are limited due to the veterinarian's inability to perform a physical examination or perform diagnostic tests .

Telemedicine is not intended to replace in-person care, but instead to facilitate the timely provision of veterinary care in circumstances where timely access to in-person care is not possible, in the best interest of the patient.

### **3. Does 'telemedicine' include consultations between veterinarians?**

Veterinarians often consult with other veterinarians on cases – discussing examination findings, diagnostic results, differentials and treatment recommendations; “consulting” would even include a more formal vet-to-vet arrangement of sending out diagnostic imaging for interpretation, or tissue samples for histology. This is often referred to as teleconsulting

and is not included within the definition of telemedicine, which is focussed on the interaction between and services provided by a veterinarian to a client.

#### **4. Where is the practice of telemedicine occurring (ie. Jurisdiction) when a veterinarian and an animal are not in the same location?**

The College of Veterinarians of British Columbia (CVBC) considers that professional services are rendered *where the animal(s) is located*. All veterinarians who are treating animal(s), groups of animals, or herd(s) that are in British Columbia (BC) must be licensed in BC. Veterinarians who treat BC animals, groups of animals, or herds without CVBC licensure (registration in an active class) are engaging in the unauthorized practice of veterinary medicine.

#### **5. What are some examples of the appropriate use of telemedicine?**

- A family on vacation consults with their veterinarian with whom they have a VCPR about an issue related to their pet's diabetes that the veterinarian has been treating. The veterinarian determines that he or she can consult about the condition without a physical examination, because one was performed recently
- A family skypes with their veterinarian to confer about a follow-up question after a recent onsite appointment
- A veterinarian consults with a client in a remote region via e-mail, inclusive of digital photographs.
- A food producer consults with their herd veterinarian via video chat about a potential skin condition in a herd

#### **6. Does service to a remote area require a valid and pre-existing VCPR if a client cannot get to a veterinarian in time?**

As noted in the [VCPR Standard](#), there are exceptions to the need to establish a VCPR prior to providing veterinary medicine, including situations where a veterinarian, acting reasonably and with evidence, determines that there is an emergency situation and that an animal or animals require(s) immediate veterinary services. This exception applies both:

- to a situation where a veterinarian is faced with an animal in need of urgent care but circumstances don't allow for the full requirements of a VCPR to be met in the moment; and also
- to a situation where a veterinarian is engaged via telemedicine for an animal in need of care where a VCPR has not previously been established in person, but circumstances prevent the owner from accessing timely in-person veterinary care.

## **7. Does a veterinarian have to work from an accredited facility to practice via telemedicine?**

Yes.

Veterinary services must be provided at/through CVBC-accredited practice facilities – this includes telemedicine services. Clients and patients seen by a veterinarian via telemedicine are clients and patients of that veterinarian’s practice facility. Veterinarians do not have to be physically present at the accredited facility to provide telemedicine service, although they can be. Veterinarians who connect with new clients via a telemedicine platform should ensure that they are doing so with the awareness and support of the owner and Designated Registrant of their practice facility.

## **8. How often should a veterinarian see an animal, group of animals, or herd in person when practising via telemedicine?**

As established in the VCPR standard, provision of veterinary services to a patient requires recent and sufficient knowledge of the animal/herd’s condition and circumstances. In each instance, appropriate timelines for in-person visits will depend on the circumstances of a case and on the earlier-established VCPR and so are left to the professional and competent judgement of the veterinarian.

## **9. Can a veterinarian work with a third-party company that provides a software or web interface which offers virtual access to veterinary services?**

Yes. Third-party companies may offer and provide services to veterinarians that facilitate public access to veterinary services. Veterinarians should ensure that third-party companies are allowing the public to choose their veterinarian and should not be involve a fee-splitting arrangement<sup>1</sup>. Veterinary service must be provided by veterinarians only and veterinarians must be affiliated with an accredited facility. A third-party company’s telemedicine platform is not an accredited facility.

## **10. How will clients know who is responding to a query via telemedicine?**

A veterinarian must always clearly identify themselves and indicate their location and accredited facility name to the client as an assurance of the veterinarian’s identity. They should indicate that this information is verifiable on the public register.

---

<sup>1</sup> CVBC [Bylaws, Part 4](#), s. 230 *Fee Splitting*

## 11. When should veterinarians respond to queries made via telemedicine?

Telemedicine is merely a mode of delivering veterinary medicine. Practising via telemedicine does not change a veterinarian's existing professional obligations to provide guidance to clients on what is necessary to provide safe, quality animal care. A veterinarian may choose whether to utilize telemedicine as a tool for providing veterinary services, and when doing so, must be satisfied that telemedicine is an appropriate tool for that circumstance.

## 12. Is it permissible to bill clients for services that are provided via telemedicine?

Veterinarians are entitled to charge for veterinary services provided to clients, including for services provided via telemedicine when they feel that it would be appropriate to do so.

Informed consent<sup>2</sup> of the client is a prerequisite to providing a veterinary service, and includes an initial estimate of the cost of the proposed services. Clients/potential clients should be aware of the costs of a telemedicine consultation and of any additional veterinary services associated with that consult.

Veterinarians also must comply with the CVBC's bylaws regarding charges and statements of fees<sup>3</sup>

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

A veterinarian's existing legal and professional obligations are not altered when veterinary services are provided via telemedicine. This includes the requirement to keep accurate and complete medical records which must be kept at the accredited facility that the veterinarian is associated with. Veterinarians are required to adhere to the medical records requirements established by the CVBC in their Professional Practice Standards<sup>4</sup> when providing veterinary medicine via telemedicine. A veterinarian should identify within the record that services were provided via telemedicine. Following a telemedicine encounter, the veterinarian should promptly forward copies of medical records to a client's primary care veterinarian to ensure continuity of care, if applicable and with consent from the client.

---

<sup>2</sup> CVBC Bylaws, Part 4, s. 211 *Informed Consent*

<sup>3</sup> Bylaws, Part 4, s. 229 *Charges and statements*

<sup>4</sup> see the standards listed under "Medical Records" on the CVBC website (cvbc.ca, [Resources/Legislation, Standards & Policies](#))