



Coronavirus:

URGENT NOTICE **from the College of Veterinarians of Ontario**

March 18, 2020

College Temporarily Relaxes Certain Regulations on Prescribing and Dispensing During Public Health Emergency

As the need for physical distancing and other public health measures to curb the spread of COVID-19 exists, the challenges relating to regulations prohibiting prescribing via telemedicine alone have become clear. As a result, the College has made a decision to temporarily relax certain regulations relating to prescribing via telemedicine during the current public health emergency.

Prescribing and Dispensing Drugs Via Telemedicine Alone

The ability to prescribe drugs to an animal in Ontario is, and continues to be, restricted to licensed veterinarians in Ontario.

Under the College's existing rules and regulations, a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) may be established via telemedicine alone.

Currently, College regulations and policy state that a licensed veterinarian may not prescribe drugs when practising via telemedicine alone, as they would not have recent and sufficient knowledge of the animal obtained by a physical examination.

The College has made the decision to not strictly enforce certain provisions of our regulation (section 33. (1) (b) of Regulation 1093) during the current public health emergency. Veterinarians may now, until otherwise directed, prescribe a non-controlled drug using telemedicine alone, in cases where they have not conducted an in-person examination of the animal(s), and where they deem this necessary and prudent in their professional judgment. In such a case, the assessment of the animal(s) would be conducted virtually where a veterinarian can gather sufficient information on the animal(s) via telemedicine to reach at least a general or preliminary diagnosis, and continue to maintain medical records.

Possible scenarios currently are:

- As is the case currently, a licensed veterinarian within an existing VCPR may prescribe drugs for a patient with a known condition via telemedicine alone where they have recent and sufficient knowledge.

- Now, within an existing VCPR, where the patient is being presented for a new condition via telemedicine, a veterinarian may prescribe a non-controlled drug using telemedicine alone.
- Now, when a new VCPR is established via telemedicine, a veterinarian may prescribe a non-controlled drug using telemedicine alone.

Dispensing Drugs for an Animal Pursuant to another Veterinarian's Prescription

In general, veterinarians do not act as dispensing pharmacies for each other and are not obligated to dispense drugs outside of a VCPR but during these uncertain times a client's regular veterinarian may not be available. There is a narrowly-defined exemption in the College's regulations, which is not changing, that allows a veterinarian to dispense a non-controlled drug pursuant to a prescription from another veterinarian who is licensed in Ontario (the prescribing veterinarian) when the following conditions are met:

- (a) it is not reasonably possible for the client to obtain the drug from the prescribing veterinarian or a pharmacy;
- (b) it is necessary in the interests of the animal to administer or dispense the drug without the delay that would be associated with returning to the prescribing veterinarian;
- (c) the dispensing veterinarian makes a reasonable effort to discuss the matter with the prescribing member;
- (d) the dispensing veterinarian conducts a sufficient assessment of the animal's circumstances, which may not require a physical examination in every case, to ascertain that it is unlikely that there has been a material change in the circumstances since the prescription was given;
- (e) the quantity of the drug dispensed is no more than would reasonably enable the client to return to the prescribing veterinarian for future prescriptions or quantities of the drug; and
- (f) the dispensing veterinarian makes a written record of the transaction.

Inter-Professional Collaboration

Both veterinarians and pharmacists are dispensing professions. In these challenging times, it is of the utmost importance to work collaboratively, inter-professionally, and responsibly to reduce unnecessary exposure to COVID-19 and assist where drugs may be in short supply. Veterinarians are encouraged to reach out to, and co-operate with, pharmacies for the purposes of dispensing, where this would allow for greater accessibility and less exposure to COVID-19.