



Veterinary Telemedicine and the Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship

Veterinary telehealth and, in particular, telemedicine, holds great promise for improving continuity of care and strengthening the relationship between veterinarians, their clients, and their patients. Used appropriately, telemedicine can enhance accessibility, client communication, and ongoing monitoring and care of veterinary patients.

The veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is fundamental to veterinary practice, and establishing it appropriately is necessary for the responsible provision of high-quality veterinary care. Veterinary telemedicine should only be conducted within an existing VCPR, with the exception of advice given in an emergency until the patient can be seen by the veterinarian.

An in-person examination or timely visits to the premises where the animals are kept is critical to establishing the VCPR.

- For a veterinarian to diagnose and treat an animal, and to prescribe or dispense medications, a VCPR must be in effect that meets requirements under the state's Veterinary Practice Act.
- A federal VCPR must be in place to use FDA-approved animal drugs in any manner that differs from their approved labeling, use any FDA-approved human drugs (including over-the-counter medications), use compounded drugs, authorize a Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD), and use certain USDA-approved biologics. FDA requires an in-person examination or timely visits to the premise where animals are kept for these common activities because this degree of oversight is necessary to ensure that medications, including antimicrobials and controlled substances, are used judiciously and to protect the quality and safety of the nation's food supply. A federal VCPR cannot be established through telemedicine.
- It is essential for the ethical practice of veterinary medicine. The AVMA's Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics requires a VCPR be established in-person. A veterinarian must be familiar with the animal, its medical history, and the client to provide the best possible care.

Without an initial in-person examination or visit to the premises where the animals are kept, the risks of misdiagnosis, failure or delay in conducting appropriate diagnostics, and ineffective treatment (including inappropriate prescribing) increase and can lead to poor clinical outcomes. In addition, veterinarians treat a multitude of species that can be affected by a large number of diseases and conditions. Failure to identify, properly diagnose, treat, and control zoonotic (e.g., rabies, ringworm, scabies, methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* [MRSA] infection, glanders, some influenzas) and other high-consequence diseases (e.g., African swine fever, foot-and-mouth disease) can have significant adverse public health and/or economic impacts.

Veterinary telemedicine is most effective and safest—for patients, clients, and veterinarians/veterinary practices—when used to maintain a VCPR that has already been established via an in-person examination. **We support the recommendation of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) that a VCPR should not be established via electronic means.**