

College Council sets standard on telemedicine

The Council of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario recently approved a new standard regarding the use of telemedicine in the delivery of veterinary medicine



in Ontario.

The professional practice standard, approved by Council in March, defines telemedicine as the delivery of veterinary medicine using information and communication technologies where the veterinarian and the patient are not in the same physical location.

The College's expectations of veterinarians remain the same whether they are delivering service in-person or through telemedicine. The College is one of the first regulators in North America to support the establishment of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) via telemedicine.

As you know, the VCPR is the foundation of effective veterinary medicine and animal care. A VCPR exists when the veterinarian has been retained by the owner of the animal; when the veterinarian and the client agree as to the scope of services to be provided to the animal; and also when the veterinarian has advised the client that services will only be provided in accordance with the standards of practice of the profession. The VCPR is maintained by the veterinarian having recent and sufficient knowledge of the animal.

The standard expects that a veterinarian will use his/her judgment to determine whether telemedicine is appropriate to each specific circumstance. The need for a physical examination in order to make an appropriate diagnosis will continue to be essential in many cases. As well, drugs cannot be prescribed through telemedicine alone.

The College initially established a position on telemedicine in 2015. The policy was revised and posted for public consultation this winter. The Professional Practice Standard on Telemedicine is available on the College's website.