

**NSVMA POSITION STATEMENT
USING TELEMEDICINE TO DEAL WITH ISSUES OF COVID-19 VIRUS
March 16, 2020**

The NSVMA recognizes that the COVID-19 virus situation may impact the ability of licensed veterinarians to provide professional care to their clients. Council has adopted the following position statement to guide veterinarians who wish to incorporate telemedicine procedures during the declared pandemic.

The NSVMA currently does not have specific Legislation around the issue of telemedicine practice. The Association, in collaboration with the Canadian Council of Veterinary Registrars (CCVR), is currently working toward the development of a telemedicine position statement but to date it is still a work in progress.

Telemedicine is defined as the provision of specific veterinary medical advice and veterinary treatment of an animal(s) based on the remote diagnosis of disease and injury by means of telecommunications technologies where no physical examination of the animal(s) by the veterinarian takes place. It does not include consultation between veterinarians where colleagues in different physical locations consult remotely with each other or the provision of general, non-specific, advice.

The following documentation applies to NSVMA licensed veterinarians with a valid VCPR seeking to serve their existing clients/patients remotely using telemedicine during the novel Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Regulatory Authority

There are two models under consideration in Canada. The first model is that the regulator's role is to regulate any veterinarian treating animals in its jurisdiction (sometimes referred to as "telemedicine which occurs where the animal is located/resides"). The second model is that the regulator maintains jurisdiction over its own members regardless of where the member and client/animal is located at the time of the telemedicine encounter. The NSVMA holds the position that the practice of veterinary medicine occurs where the Veterinarian is located. Therefore, veterinarian residing in Nova Scotia providing telemedicine to clients/patients in Nova Scotia must be licensed by the NSVMA.

General Professional Obligations

The use of telemedicine does not alter the ethical, professional and legal obligations of a veterinarian, including but not limited to:

1. licensure;
2. the establishment of a VCPR;

3. informed client consent (including consent to treatment and as related to telemedicine technologies);
4. privacy, confidentiality and security of client and animal information;
5. the appropriateness of the use of telemedicine;
6. prescribing; and
7. follow up.

Specific Professional Obligations

1. Licensure

A veterinarian must hold current licensure by the NSVMA in order to provide telemedicine veterinary services in Nova Scotia.

2. Additional Elements to the Conventional VCPR

A formal and accepted VCPR must be established between the client/patient and the veterinarian. Within an established VCPR, a veterinarian using telemedicine to provide medical services to an animal is also expected to:

- a. disclose his/her identity, location and licence status to the client;
- b. take appropriate steps to confirm the identity of the client and animal; and
- c. explain in plain language the appropriateness and limitations of veterinary services provided by telemedicine;

3. Assessing the Appropriateness of the Use of Telemedicine for Each Animal

A veterinarian using telemedicine to provide veterinary services to an animal is expected to:

- a. ensure he/she has sufficient training and competency to manage an animal through telemedicine;
- b. assess an animal's presenting condition and the appropriateness of telemedicine to provide care;
- c. take reasonable steps to assess all available resources that are required to provide medical services, including animal information, the technology, the presence of support staff (both where the veterinarian is located and where the animal is located), linkages with other services (e.g. laboratory), etc., and proceed only if those resources are available, safe and secure, and can be used effectively and in a private manner.

4. Medical Records and the Privacy, Confidentiality, Security of and Access to Animal Information

A veterinarian is required to create and maintain a medical record as part of the provision of a telemedicine service. The requirement to create such a record is the same whether the care is provided face-to-face or via telemedicine inclusive of retention, transmission, archival and retrieval. The medical record will document in detail the procedures used to confirm the VCPR, the investigation of the patient's condition, diagnostic pathways leading to a diagnosis, prescribing information, and recommended follow-up care.

5. Prescribing practices

A veterinarian is expected to prescribe in accordance with the standards of the NSVMA. Those standards include:

- a. the establishment of a valid VCPR,
- b. the determination of a diagnosis using medically acceptable standards and techniques,
and
- c. the ability for follow-up and necessary patient care.

6. Accredited Facility

Any veterinarians practicing telemedicine in Nova Scotia must do so from an accredited practice facility.

7. DISCUSSION:

This policy has been put into place specifically to assist veterinary practices in dealing with the declared novel Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic. It will expire upon the government announcement of the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This policy will not allow a veterinarian to diagnosis or prescribe for a patient with which the accredited practice does not have a valid VCPR currently in place.

Prescriptions place over the telephone must be clearly documented in the patient record. If to be filled at a dispensary other than the veterinary facility, the prescription will be delivered to the client or dispensing facility by electronic means (pdf, jpeg, etc.).