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Case Study: Establishing a Valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (Cow-Calf Producer)

Effective December 1, 2018, Health Canada will require a registered veterinarian to prescribe and provide oversight of all medically important antimicrobials used in animals. The 'increased veterinary oversight' requires that producers work closely with a veterinarian.

This case study is intended to reinforce:

- a Veterinarian-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) is not sufficient to purchase prescription medication
- a VCPR is a partnership between a veterinarian and a client and considers the animal patient
- a VCPR is a tool necessary to develop a prescription
- a prescription is necessary for the acquisition of prescription drugs

A family owned cow-calf operation is located approximately 80 kilometres north of a small urban center and the nearest veterinary practice that provides ambulatory large animal services.

The previous two generations have not routinely used the services of a veterinarian except the occasional call for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) surveillance sampling and Brucella vaccination of heifers being exported out of the country decades ago.

The owners dealt with any health related matters; medical supplies for calving and treating sick animals, including antimicrobials, were purchased at the local feed store.

Ian, who is the third generation on the family ranch, has recently assumed management of the cow herd. Ian is keen to grow the herd and institute management changes to increase, efficiency, profitability, and sustainability.

He is active in producer organizations and is aware that use of veterinary services will play an important role in his plans for the ranch. He is also aware that new federal regulations will require veterinary oversight of antimicrobial use. He researched several veterinary practices to determine which veterinarians can provide services to meet his needs.

He determines Dr. Willard, who works in a mixed animal practice with two other veterinarians located in the local community, may be able to meet his needs. In December, Ian sets up a meeting with Dr. Willard to discuss required services for the coming year.



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The meeting takes place at the ranch and lasts for 1 ½ hours. Ian does a herd walk-through with Dr. Willard, examining the calving grounds and discussing swath grazing of his pregnant cows. They review the herd production records and previous health management strategies, including bull selection, breeding management, calving season, disease incidence, vaccination strategies, and plans for marketing of calves.

The veterinarian establishes the relationship with the client and has assumed the responsibility for making clinical assessments and recommendations regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment.

Through the course of the meeting, Dr. Willard gets a good understanding of the operation of the ranch and Ian is comfortable with the questions Dr. Willard is asking. They agree they will be able to work together.

Dr. Willard takes notes and establishes a medical record throughout the meeting.

During the course of the meeting and conversation about the upcoming calving season, it is discussed that the ranch has dealt with higher than expected incidence of neonatal diarrhea (scours). There has not been any investigation into the cause of the scours and there have been no post mortems completed to determine a diagnosis. The cow herd has not been vaccinated.

The veterinarian must consider the 'patient' in the relationship in that he has collected sufficient knowledge of the specific animal(s) on which to base the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of the medical condition of the animal or group of animals.

Dr. Willard makes some general recommendations for management of newborn calves and treating calves affected with diarrhea. Given the new relationship and understanding of the operation and management, Dr. Willard is able to provide a step-by-step protocol for treating calf scours. The steps include separating the pair from the herd, conducting an assessment of temperature and hydration status, administering fluids and, for some cases, administration of pain medication and an antimicrobial. The protocol also includes clear instructions for when to call the veterinarian.

Through the development of the treatment protocol, Dr. Willard has established the medical need for prescription drugs. The protocol in itself is not a prescription and the medications (antibiotic and pain medication) will each require a prescription.

Dr. Willard is able to provide a prescription, specific for the calves expected to be born during the upcoming calving season and affected with neonatal diarrhea. Each medication prescribed is specific for the group of calves and specifies the dose and duration of treatment. The total amount of antibiotic prescribed is expected to be sufficient for the expected number of cases of calf scours. The same applies for the prescription for the pain medication.

The client agrees to follow the veterinarian's recommendations and prescription.

If there are more cases requiring treatment than what the prescribed amounts of the medications can treat, Ian will need to consult with Dr. Willard, who will re-assess if further investigation or diagnostic testing is required and/or another course of therapy will be prescribed.

The veterinarian is available or has arranged for follow-up evaluation, especially in the event of adverse reactions or failure of the treatment regimen.

Once the valid prescription is issued and is on file at Dr. Willard's practice, if Ian encounters calves with scours during calving season, he will consult the treatment protocol and may visit the veterinary practice to have the prescription filled without having to further discuss the matter with Dr. Willard or another veterinarian. Alternatively, Ian could request a copy of the prescription to have it filled at another veterinary practice or pharmacy.

The existing prescription on file allows access to the required medications – they are dispensed according to the valid prescription.

Producers who do not regularly work with a veterinarian are encouraged to seek out the services of a veterinarian who can meet their needs.