



CANADIAN VETERINARY
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES MÉDECINS VÉTÉRINAIRES

Veterinary Telemedicine

What is Telemedicine?

Telemedicine refers to the practice of veterinary medicine (advice, diagnosis, treatment) which occurs at a distance using telecommunication between a veterinarian and an animal owner. In other words, telemedicine is a veterinary medical practice tool, and involves medical information regarding a patient's clinical health status communicated via electronic methods. Telemedicine does not replace current veterinary medicine practice but is a complementary tool. A valid veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR) must exist and all the other regulatory requirements, such as informed consent, must be followed to allow a veterinarian to diagnose and treat a patient via telemedicine.

What is a Valid VCPR?

A valid veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is extremely important when practicing veterinary medicine. A valid VCPR is where a veterinarian has assumed responsibility for the medical care of a client's animal, and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's directions. A valid VCPR indicates a veterinarian has adequate knowledge of an animal to pursue diagnosis and treatments of various conditions and implies timely care and follow-up of the animal.

The establishment of a valid VCPR most often requires a veterinarian to have completed a physical exam (or on-site visit for large animals or apiaries). Once a VCPR has been established it can usually be continued by telemedicine using a veterinarian's clinical judgement on what is best for the animal. However, in some provinces (such as Ontario, and temporarily in B.C. and Alberta) a VCPR can be established virtually using telemedicine. Please refer to each province's regulations concerning the establishment of a valid VCPR. A list of provincial regulatory bodies can be found [here](#).

What is Telehealth?

Telehealth is a global overarching term that includes all uses of technology aimed to deliver health information or education via remote means. Telemedicine is a branch of telehealth where a valid VCPR exists. Other branches of telehealth include teleconsultation and telerriage.

What is Teleconsultation?

Teleconsultation is a consultation using telecommunication that takes place between a consulting veterinarian and an attending veterinarian who is seeking advice. An example of this is discussing a medical case with a specialist such as a radiologist, pathologist, internist, or another colleague. Teleconsulting is not telemedicine, and the attending veterinarian is responsible for all information gathered using teleconsultation.

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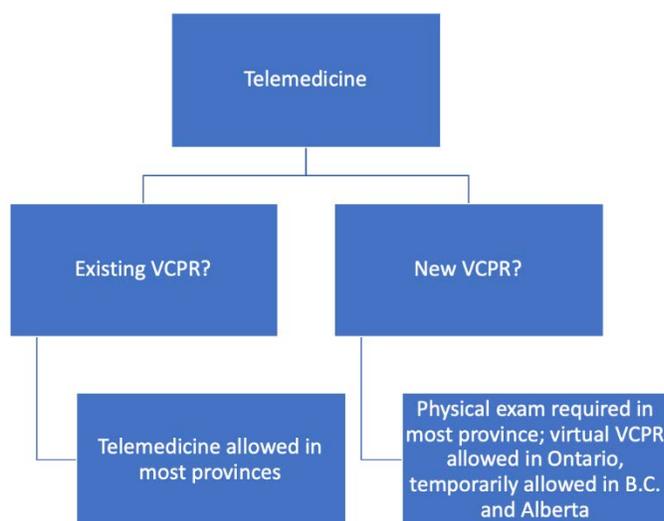
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What is Teletriage?

Teletriage is the providing of general medical information by a veterinarian or veterinary clinic staff member that is not intended to specifically diagnose or treat a patient. It is information given to facilitate prudent care, such as the need for yearly examinations or screening of certain diseases.

Am I Allowed to Offer Telemedicine in my Jurisdiction?

It is important that you become familiar with your provincial licensing body's regulations concerning telemedicine and the establishment of a valid VCPR as these vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, some provinces are allowing for the temporary creation of a virtual VCPR based on a veterinarian's clinical judgement of the necessity to do so. This virtual VCPR is based on a veterinarian practicing through an accredited veterinary facility (hospital, clinic).



How can Telemedicine be Used?

Telemedicine is a tool that expands our ability to provide care to our patients. There are multiple scenarios where telemedicine may be adequate to provide veterinary care. Examples include certain recheck examinations, continued management of chronic diseases in pre-existing patients, and preventative care examinations (such as renewing tick/flea and heartworm medications). Within the limitations of the current COVID-19 pandemic, telemedicine can also facilitate remote information gathering from animal owners with new or changing concerns. Examination of the patient may then be conducted virtually (depending on your jurisdiction's regulations; this is where the owner facilitates examination through your instructions) or by drop-off at the veterinary hospital. Diagnostics and treatments can also be carried out once the animal is dropped off. This allows for social distancing while continuing to provide veterinary medical care. Telemedicine may also help offer veterinary services to those less likely to visit veterinary clinics due to other concerns (distance, transportation, anxious animals, family situation, owner illness).

What are the Limitations of Telemedicine?

Telemedicine is only an extension of what veterinary medicine provides. It does not replace what is currently done or what is deemed necessary by a practitioner. In other words, if a physical exam and/or diagnostics are necessary, then this should be requested and conducted while respecting social distancing (such as drop-offs).

What about Prescribing Medications and Telemedicine?

Once again, it is important to become familiar with your province's telemedicine regulations as this varies between jurisdictions.

What Cases should I see Using Telemedicine?

The CVMA recently distributed an advisory titled "[Veterinary Medicine during a Time of Restriction of Elective Services and Social Distancing](#)." It offers comprehensive guidelines on what could be considered essential services, what can be postponed, and what could be practiced through veterinary telemedicine. Also, the British Small Animal Veterinary Medical Association (BSAVA) published a triage tool for cats and dogs to help veterinarians sort which cases to prioritize: bsava.com/TriageTool

Do I Need Client Consent?

Yes. Informed client consent should always be obtained just as it would be when seeing a client and their animal in-person and performing a physical exam and recommending diagnostics/treatments for their animal. Note in the animal's chart that verbal (or written consent via email, etc.) was received. You may wish to have another staff member present to witness verbal consent.

What do I do for Physical Exams?

In most instances a physical exam and further diagnostics (medical imaging, laboratory assessments, etc.) are necessary. The CVMA's and the BSAVA's documents also describe possible scenarios where this could apply and where an animal could be dropped off at a clinic for further workup while respecting social distancing.

Ensure the client has the means (such as a well-lit and quiet space, clear communication, etc.) to provide you with the necessary information if a virtual exam is deemed appropriate.

What Should I do for Medical Records? Should I Record my Interactions?

Telemedicine does not change the need to appropriately and thoroughly document all pertinent medical findings in an official and written document. Please refer to your local regulatory body for more information. Many telehealth platforms can record sessions to help with medical record-keeping and to share with owners for their review of your instructions. Recording your telemedicine session is usually not necessary and would require direct client consent to do so. Just as with in-person client/animal meetings, a veterinarian may wish to follow-up a telemedicine consultation with a summary document sent electronically to the client detailing exam findings, working diagnoses, treatment plan/options, and follow-up plan. This document can also be included in the medical record.

What Platform Should I Use for Telemedicine?

There are multiple ways to offer telemedicine. There is no Canadian veterinary standard in terms of which platform to use. Most of you have likely already sent emails to clients and received information (text, videos, pictures) about your patients. This is considered telemedicine and, as such, should be documented in the medical record of the patient. Telemedicine can also include live video streaming with you and the client/pet. This can be done in a number of ways: via everyday apps such as Skype, Facetime and others; to online communication platforms such as Microsoft Teams or Zoom; to more complete and elaborate platforms that have higher security and more tools to help you practice telemedicine (including billing, virtual waiting rooms, scheduling etc.; see resources below).

The choice of platforms depends on your needs as a provider: ease-of-use, security, payment methods, documentation, video capabilities, number of users, etc. Some of these telehealth platforms offer software in both French and English.

What Should I do for Payment?

Telemedicine is an extension of your existing practice. Compensation for services can be collected through online platforms as well (for instance PayPal, email transfer, or the telehealth software providers).

What Resources can Help me become Familiar with Telemedicine?

Please find some resources below to help understand what telemedicine is, some useful information on what services to offer, and examples of available platforms (note: the CVMA does not specifically endorse any of the mentioned platforms, nor does this constitute a complete list of available telehealth services).

- **CVMA** COVID-19 web page: canadianveterinarians.net/coronavirus-covid-19
- **AVMA** telemedicine definitions and explanations: avma.org/resources-tools/animal-health-and-welfare/telehealth-telemedicine-veterinary-practice
- **Dr. Scott Weese's blog** and information on veterinary medicine, social distancing: wormsandgermsblog.com/2020/03/articles/miscellaneous/veterinary-medicine-essential-services-and-social-distancing/
- **BSAVA** cat and dog triage tool: bsava.com/TriageTool
- **Zoom**: zoom.us
- **Microsoft Teams**: products.office.com/en-ca/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software
- **JotForm** to help make template forms: jotform.com/myforms
- **SmartVet** telehealth platform (Canadian): smart.vet
- **Pawzy** telehealth platform (Canadian): pawzy.co/telehealth/clinics
- **GoFetch Health** (Canadian): health.gofetch.ca
- **VetNOW**, a US telemedicine (including specialty care) and telehealth platform with a Canadian presence: vetnow.com
- **Doxy.me**, a US telehealth platform for healthcare professionals: doxy.me
- **Lifelearn teletriage**: lifelearn.com/clinics/products/veterinary-telehealth (CVMA members receive a 10 per cent savings on LifeLearn products: WebDVM, ALLYDVM, ClientEd, Sofie and PetNurse)

Document prepared on April 6, 2020 by Dr. Serge Chalhoub, National Issues Committee member of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA.) Definitions and examples in this document were adapted from the AVMA's Telehealth and Telemedicine in Veterinary Practice resource page and VCA Canada's Telemedicine resource guide for member clinics/hospitals.