



CANADIAN VETERINARY  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION

L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE  
DES MÉDECINS VÉTÉRINAIRES

## Cyberbullying in the Veterinary Profession

*This article is a revised version of a document distributed by the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association for its veterinary professionals. **This revised version is intended for veterinarians in Quebec** and is based on restrictions regarding advertising contained in Section 36 of the Quebec Code of Ethics of Veterinary Surgeons. The CVMA is grateful to the OMVQ for its feedback.*

Recently, Dr. Andy Roark, a well-known American veterinarian and media personality, shared his personal experience of cyberbullying: <http://www.drandyroark.com/im-being-cyber-bullied/>

Unfortunately, his case is not the first; there have been countless others. Perhaps the most well-known case involves Dr. Shirley Koshi, a Bronx, New York veterinarian, who committed suicide in February 2014 following cyberbullying and financial pressures.

A good point, made by Dr. Roark, which should be reiterated, is if you, as a veterinary professional, have been cyberbullied, you are not alone.

The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) provides some suggestions to help handle controversial issues in your hospital and on social media and online review sites. (<http://www.aaha.org/blog/post/939500/Handling-controversial-issues-in-your-hospital-and-online.aspx>)

### In the hospital

- A position statement serves as the starting point for your practice when anyone asks about a particular topic. A best practice is to develop position statements for potential controversial procedures or issues so your clients are aware of your policies.
- Include client education materials on animal health your website that you can refer clients to when they call your practice to discuss problems.
- Ensure every interaction with every client is polite and professional.

### On social media and online review sites

- Set up alerts to monitor what is being said online about your practice. Monitoring services like Google Alerts and Mention scan the web for mentions of a practice—both positive and negative. Visit [google.com/alerts](http://google.com/alerts) and [mention.net](http://mention.net) to set up alerts for the names of your practice and veterinarians. You can choose to receive daily updates via email whenever your practice or veterinarians are mentioned online.
- Monitor your Facebook page and Twitter daily for comments and posts about your practice. Make sure you remove all messages of support or gratitude as soon as possible since, according to Section 36 of the Code of Ethics of Veterinary Surgeons, **no veterinary surgeon may, in his**

***advertising, use an expression of support or gratitude concerning him, or allow such advertising to be used.***

- After deleting the comments that are cause for concern, it is recommended to respond **privately** to your fans and critics:
  - Responding to positive posts is easy: thank them for the review and reiterate that you're pleased to serve them.

Be polite and friendly when responding to negative posts and reviews, and encourage commenters to call your hospital to continue the conversation.

- As for fraudulent reviews from non-clients, you are encouraged to comment directly on social media, in a concise and polite manner, referring to the erroneous posting and rectifying the facts, to ensure moderation on social networks and prevent any escalation. Defamation must not be tolerated and abusive cases can be reported to authorities.

CVMA provides a Wellness section for members that lists crisis centres, resources and support services available across Canada: <http://www.canadianveterinarians.net/documents/resources/vet-health-wellness-helplines-support-services>

**Other articles that may provide additional tips to deal with cyberbullying:**

<http://www.lifelearn.com/2015/09/04/how-to-deal-with-cyberbullying-on-social-media/>

<http://veterinaryteam.dvm360.com/how-handle-cyberbullies-and-other-veterinary-client-tyrants?pageID=2>

<https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/141115a.aspx>

<http://www.petful.com/pet-health/cyberbullying/>

<http://words.usask.ca/wcvm/2014/04/police-chief-addresses-cyberbullying/>