


Veterinary Telemedicine

What is it, how do we use it, what's new



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On The Menu

1. **What is telemedicine?**
 - a) VCPR
 - b) Teleconsultation
 - c) Teletriage
 - d) VPE
 - e) CVMA, AVMA PS
2. **What is allowed?**
 - a) CCVR
 - b) Ontario
 - c) Alberta
 - d) British Columbia
3. **How can I use it?**
 - a) Rechecks
 - b) Distant exams
 - c) Teletriage
4. **What's next?**
 - a) Wearables?
 - b) Travelling RVTs?
 - c) Artificial intelligence?




Thank you!!!



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Max Poubelle

- **6 year-old Labrador**
 - Likely ate something he wasn't supposed to
 - Now diarrhea "painting" the house
 - Still eating and drinking
 - Likely diagnosis?
 - Likely treatment?




- **The issue... Max lives 4h away and you've never met him or owner...**

Poll: What can you do for Max?

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Dr. Urea Fluuuuted

- **Dealing with a difficult case in hospital**
 - Acute vomiting 6 year-old DSH with painful abdomen
 - Abdominal radiographs unclear
 - On phone with radiologist

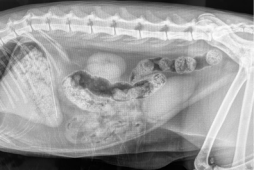


Poll: Is this telemedicine?

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Sassy Pants


- **Owner speaks to teletriage service at 9pm because her regular veterinarian's clinic line transferred here there**
 - "My sewing needle is gone! Poll: Is this telemedicine?
 - What should the owner do? (advanced preview below)



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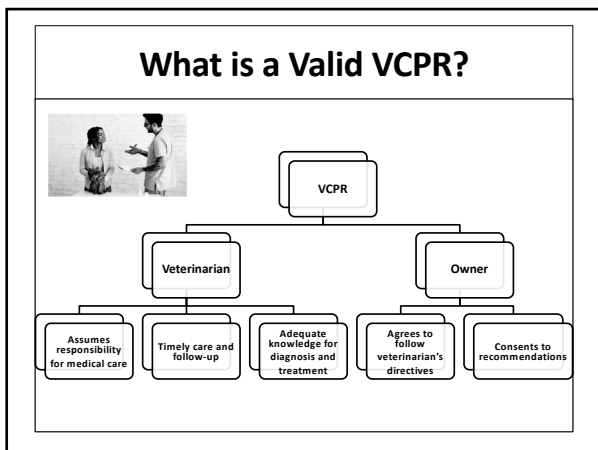
1. What is Telemedicine?

- Practice of veterinary medicine occurring at distance using telecommunication between veterinarian and animal owner
 - Tool of practice
 - Medical information communicated via electronic methods
 - Practice of veterinary medicine? What is that?
 - Veterinary-client-patient relationship (VCPR) must exist



Poll: What is a valid VCPR?

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VCPR

- Establishing a valid VCPR most often requires a veterinarian to have completed an actual physical exam
- In North America, once established it can usually be continued by telemedicine using a veterinarian's clinical judgement on what is best for the animal

➤ However, each jurisdiction differs

- Pre-pandemic: Ontario developed policy to allow virtual VCPR
- Pandemic: BC, Alberta allowed establishment of virtual VCPR




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What is Telehealth?

- Global overarching term that includes all uses of technology aimed to deliver health information or education via remote means

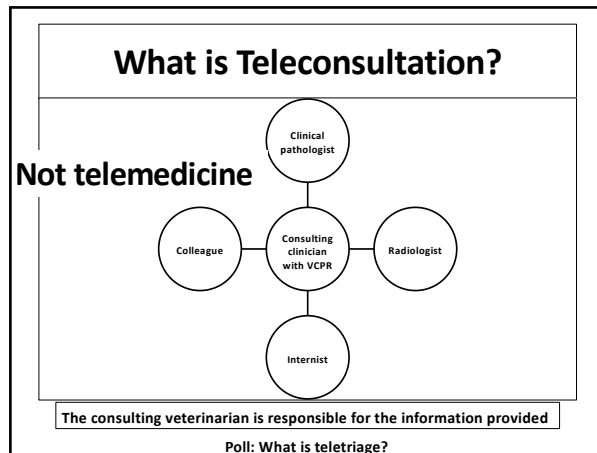
➤ Telemedicine is a branch of telehealth where a valid VCPR exists

➤ Other branches of telehealth include teleconsultation and telerriage




Poll: Is teleconsultation telemedicine?

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What is Telerriage?



- Providing general medical information by a veterinarian or veterinary clinic staff member

➤ Often AHT


➤ Not intended to specifically diagnose or treat a patient

➤ Information given to facilitate prudent care


➤ Examples: triage, screening of certain diseases, or recommending examination

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What is Telerriage?




- Telerriage has expanded greatly
 - VCPR NOT established
 - Triage tool, phone service after-hours
- Currently, cannot be a stand-alone service
 - Must be contracted through existing practices that have VPE
 - Cannot give diagnosis, but can advise owner to seek urgent care
 - Provides written report to ER hospital and also family veterinarian




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Veterinary Practice Entity

- **To practice veterinary medicine, you need:**
 - To be registered in your province
 - To be recognized through a VPE
 - The VPE is very important
 - Certified and inspected



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CVMA Position Statement

Revised 2021

- **Supports the provision of veterinary medical advice and veterinary care of animals through telemedicine**
 - *provided that the services are delivered in accordance with the policies of the provincial or territorial regulatory bodies in the jurisdiction where the animals reside and the jurisdiction where the veterinarian is licensed*
- **The CVMA cautions prospective clients of telemedicine that service provided by veterinarians from outside of Canada who are not licensed by a Canadian jurisdiction**
 - *may pose risks to animals and leave clients with no recourse in the event that a complaint arises*


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AVMA

- **Telemedicine:**
 - Use of a tool to exchange medical information electronically from one site to another to improve a patient's clinical health status
 - Tool of practice, not a separate discipline within the profession
 - Appropriate application of telemedicine can enhance animal care by facilitating communication, diagnostics, treatments, client education, scheduling, and other tasks
 - Telemedicine may only be conducted within an existing VPCR

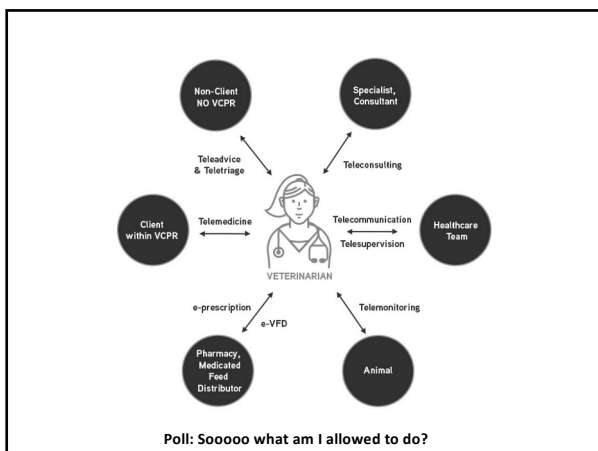
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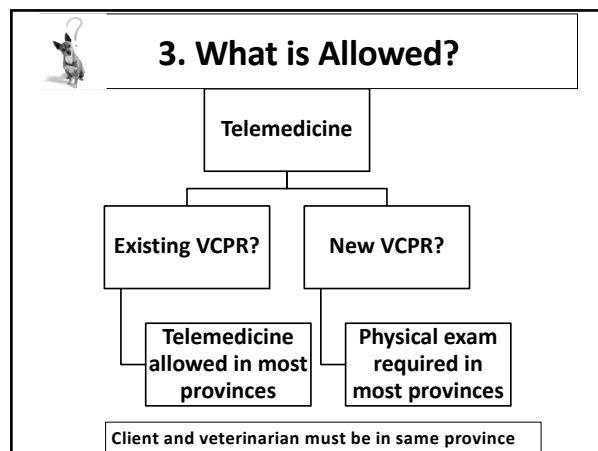
AVMA

- **Telemedicine**
 - Recommends initial physical VPCR establishment
 - Exception for advice given in an emergency until that patient can be seen by a veterinarian
 - Also exception for animal poison control centres
- **Most states require a VPCR to diagnose, prescribe medication or treat an animal**
- **Federal law also requires a VPCR for prescribing extra-label drugs for animals and issuing Veterinary Feed Directives**


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What am I Allowed?

- **Very important to become familiar with your licensing body's regulations concerning telemedicine, establishment of VCPR**
 - Variation from jurisdiction to jurisdiction
 - Because of COVID-19 pandemic, some provinces allowed for the temporary creation of a new VCPR virtually
 - Based on veterinarian's clinical judgement for necessity to do so
 - Virtual VCPR is based on veterinarian practicing through an accredited veterinary facility (hospital, clinic): VPE

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Canadian Council of Veterinary Registrars


- **2020: National policy**
 - Provincial registrars met to discuss national framework
 - However, each province has mandate to set their own policies
 - Policy defines telemedicine, and refers veterinarians to their own provincial licensing bodies for rules
 - Must disclose location to client




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College of Veterinarians of Ontario

- **Establishment of virtual VCPR allowed**
 - The first province to provide policy on virtual establishment
 - Need VPE
- **Can also prescribe, however:**
 - Short term until someone does PE
 - Must have plan for adverse reactions



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ABVMA Alberta

- **Pandemic: establishment of virtual VCPR allowed**
 - Based on attending veterinarian's judgment
 - Still needed VPE
 - However, no longer the case
- **Policy development:**
 - VCPR to be established primarily in person
 - Possible exceptions if deemed necessary
 - Development of new professional standards
 - Short term prescriptions, urgent care
 - Also, allowing RVTs to carry out some of the telemedicine aspects

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British Columbia


- **Currently undergoing policy review**
 - Questions being asked:
 - What risks exist to virtual VCPR?
 - Benefits?
 - How do we regulate?
 - Complaint-based
 - Initial VCPR standard: physical exam
 - But, discretion of attending veterinarian if virtual VCPR sufficient and justified
 - You need to be registered and also be in a VPE



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British Columbia


- **So, you can use telemedicine with existing physical VCPR**
- **And you can establish virtual VCPR if:**
 - You can justify it
 - It is justified
 - You are registered
 - You are within a VPE



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British Columbia

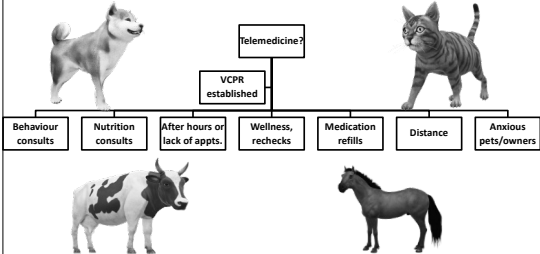
- **How can you do telemedicine?**
 - Consider the case you are seeing
 - New patient for flea/tick preventatives
 - Vs. PU/PD anorexic 14 y.o. FS DSH
 - Consider your VPE
 - Are you allowed?
 - Stand-alone telemedicine services
 - Medical records
 - Follow-up
 - How to prescribe?
 - Mail, or pick-up



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4. How Can I Use Telemedicine?


Tool that expands our ability to provide care to our patients



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How Can I Use Telemedicine?


- **Tool that expands our ability to provide care to our patients**
 - Recheck examinations
 - Chronic disease management in pre-existing patients
 - Preventative care examinations (renewing tick/flea and heartworm medications)
 - Emergency
 - Gathering information
- **Within the limitations of the pandemic, facilitated remote information gathering from animal owners with new or changing concerns**
 - 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)



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How Can I Use Telemedicine?


- **How to examine the patient?**
 - Virtual-assisted patient examination
 - With existing VCPR: useful for rechecks
 - New VCPR: refer to your province's regulations if allowed to establish valid new VCPR virtually
 - Also, use your clinical judgement; can you gain enough information from this patient with this complaint through a virtual exam?
 - Drop-off at the veterinary hospital
 - Diagnostics and treatments can also be carried out



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Physical Exam


- **Virtual vs. physical exam**
 - For virtual, make sure client can give information you need
 - Well-lit room, no distractions, clear communication
 - Make sure whatever modality is in the best interest of medical care



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Prescriptions?

- **Prescribing medications requires a valid VCPR**
 - Therefore, check with your regulatory body
 - If telemedicine allowed AND there is an existing VCPR, then prescribing ok
 - BUT you are responsible for adverse events
 - If telemedicine allowed and new VCPR can be established virtually:
 - Clinical and professional judgment
 - Enough facts/information?
 - Severity of condition? Type of medication required?
 - Need for physical exam, diagnostics?
 - Not controlled drugs



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Consent, Medical Records, Recording of Consult

- **Consent**
 - Informed client consent should always be obtained
 - Note in the animal's chart that verbal or written consent was received
- **Medical records**
 - No change in requirement
 - Some telehealth platforms assist with medical record-keeping
 - Recommend follow-up document to owner with summary/plan
- **Recording**
 - Many communication and telehealth platforms can record sessions
 - Helpful for medical records, consent, sharing information with client
 - Not necessary, client consent should be obtained

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Limitations of Telemedicine?

- **Extension of what we currently do**
 - Does not replace what we currently do
- Does not replace what a practitioner deems important for the patient
 - Limits to a virtual exam
 - Limits to what a client can describe
 - Limits to information without diagnostics
 - Limits to technology
- Limitations to regulatory bodies to "police"

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Any Evidence?

- **Complements what we do**
 - OVMA pet owner survey: 75% of owners indicated that their issue was resolved using telemedicine
 - 51% of owners hope for a veterinarian that also offers telemedicine
 - Health for Animals: 75% owners extremely satisfied or satisfied with telemedicine
 - 60% would want some telemedicine moving forward
 - RCVS study: 7 months remote telemedicine with prescribing
 - 16% of appointment had prescription; 0.8% mild adverse reaction rate
 - Good review article on DVM360
 - <https://www.dvm360.com/view/6-reasons-why-veterinary-telemedicine-is-poised-to-go-off-the-hook>

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Back to our Cases




- **What did you decide you are allowed for Max?**
- **What about Dr. Urea Fluuted?**
- **And Sassy Pants?**



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4. What's Next?


- **Wearables?**
- **Travelling RVTs?**
- **Artificial intelligence?**

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Summary

- **Pre-pandemic**
 - Very little conversations about telemedicine
 - WSAVA/CVMA National Issues Forum 2019
- **Post pandemic**
 - Maybe we see a role?
 - Another tool



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