

ANIMALS UNDER VETERINARY CARE

The Veterinary Council of Ireland is the regulatory authority that defines and interprets the terms 'under veterinary care' and "Ethical Veterinary Practice"

Animal owners¹ are the primary custodians of all aspects of animal management, welfare and health. They should have confidence that all veterinary care they procure for their animal(s) addresses the needs of their animals' welfare, their own requirements as clients and also protects public health.

Animals Under Veterinary Care

The Veterinary Council of Ireland considers animals to be "under veterinary care" where an animal owner has entrusted the veterinary care of their animals to a registered veterinary practitioner, also called the attending veterinary practitioner, either as a sole practice owner or as a group veterinary practice⁴ providing a primary veterinary service² to the public. Veterinary practitioners are entitled to charge a fee for their professional services.

Attending Veterinary Practitioner

The "attending veterinary practitioner" is a veterinary practitioner (or a group of veterinary practitioners) who has been given responsibility for primary care of a patient/herd/flock by the animal owner/keeper. A client-patient-practice relationship (CPPR) is established.

- When appropriate, attending veterinary practitioners are encouraged to seek assistance in the form of consultations and referrals. A decision to consult or refer is made jointly by the attending veterinary practitioner and the client.
- When a consultation occurs, the attending veterinary practitioner continues to be primarily responsible for the case.

Consulting Veterinary Practitioner

A "consulting veterinary practitioner" is a veterinary practitioner (or group of veterinary practitioners) who agrees to advise an attending veterinary practitioner on the care and management of a case/herd/flock. The CPPR remains the responsibility of the attending veterinary practitioner.

- Consulting veterinary practitioners should communicate their findings and opinions directly to the attending veterinary practitioners.
- Consulting veterinary practitioners should re-evaluate the patients or communicate with the clients in collaboration with the attending veterinary practitioners.
- Consultations usually involve the exchange of information or interpretation of test results. However, it may be appropriate or necessary for consultants to examine patients. When advanced or invasive techniques are required to gather information or substantiate diagnoses, attending veterinary practitioners may refer the patients. A new CPPR is established with the veterinary practitioner (or group of veterinary practitioners) for the specific animal(s) whose case(s) is/are referred.

Referral Veterinary Practitioner

The “referral veterinary practitioner” or “receiving veterinary practitioner” is a veterinary practitioner (or group of veterinary practitioners) who agrees to provide requested veterinary services. A new CPPR is established.

- Attending veterinary practitioners should honour clients’ requests for referral.
- Referral veterinary practitioners may choose to accept or decline clients and patients from attending veterinary practitioners.
- Patients are usually referred because of specific medical problems or services. Referral veterinary practitioners should provide services or treatments relative to the referred conditions, and they should communicate with the referring veterinary practitioners.

Veterinary Services Sought Without Referral

When a client seeks professional services or opinions from a different veterinary practitioner without a referral, a new CPPR is established with the new attending veterinary practitioner.

- With the client’s consent, the new attending veterinary practitioner shall contact the former veterinary practitioner to inform them of the new CPPR, and whether they are acting in the capacity of an attending, consulting or referred practitioner. When contacted, the veterinary practitioner who was formerly involved in the diagnosis, care, and treatment of the patient(s) should communicate with the new attending veterinary practitioner as if the patient and client had been referred unless informed that the new practitioner was now the attending veterinary practitioner to the animal(s).

Client-Patient-Practice Relationship (CPPR)

Irrespective of the practice structure, or range of veterinary services available to animal owners, all animals “under veterinary care” must fall within a Client-Patient-Practice-Relationship³ (CPPR). A veterinary practitioner may carry out acts of veterinary medicine on animals owned by third parties only where the CPPR fulfils the following conditions:

1. The registered veterinary practitioner (or another member of the group veterinary practice of which he or she is a member) has been given responsibility for the professional veterinary care of the animal(s), herd or flock by the owner or person in charge following a clinical examination of the individual animal or animals.
2. The registered veterinary practitioner is readily available for follow up consultation or monitoring of the condition and evaluation of the therapy.
3. The registered veterinary practitioner (or other member of the group veterinary practice) is available to respond to requests to provide urgent services of veterinary medicine and surgery and clinical procedures on the animal (or for a herd or flock), including the provision of an emergency after hours clinical service.

4. The practice has access to veterinary opinion outside its own area of expertise should it be deemed necessary by the practice or at the request of the owner.
5. Prior to treating or providing advice, a registered veterinary practitioner (or other member of the group veterinary practice of which he or she is a member) must have sufficient knowledge of the animal(s), herd or flock in question to form an opinion of the current health, welfare and disease status of the animal(s). Such knowledge and opinion shall be based on on-going direct clinical contact, ancillary test results as well as record analysis and epidemiological investigations where appropriate.
6. The records kept by the registered veterinary practitioner shall make it evident that the professional veterinary responsibility for the animal(s), herd or flock in question is real and not merely nominal. Such records shall include evidence of regular direct clinical contact and treatments prescribed for the animal(s). Where applicable, these records should be augmented from elements such as herd/flock health plans updated quarterly or disease monitoring records.
7. The use and prescribing of all veterinary medicines should demonstrate prudent practice in the interests of animal health welfare and public health.
What constitutes prudent prescribing practice can vary depending on the medicine, the species, the number of animals and environments in which they are treated.

The appropriateness of the duration between direct clinical examination of animal(s) and prescribing a medicine is a key component of prudent prescribing practice and is often contentious. Consulting, Referring and newly appointed attending veterinary practitioners must carry out a clinical assessment of animal(s) immediately prior to advising on or prescribing medication.

For attending veterinary practitioners, a maximum interval of 90 days could be expected to cover most practical situations. However attending veterinary practitioners alone have the discretion to exceed this limit based on their professional judgement and their records and knowledge set out in points 5 and 6. In light of the risk to public health from Antimicrobial Resistance, however, attending veterinary practitioners should not exceed a maximum limit of 30 days between direct veterinary practitioner-animal clinical contact and the prescribing of antimicrobials. (Ref VCI poster on prudent use of antimicrobials)

In all instances, the Council reserves the right to decide whether specific instances or patterns of prescribing/supplying veterinary medicines is prudent based on the risks to animal health & welfare and public health.

8. The client may terminate the CPPR at any time. The practice may terminate the CPPR with notice and where animal welfare is not compromised.
9. Where a client terminates a CPPR with one practice and engages another practice then a new CPPR is established as described in 1 above. In the absence of contractual or other issues, the new practice is entitled to the clinical records of the patient(s).

- 10.** Where a second opinion (referral) practice is sought by the primary practice or the owner, a new CPPR is established only for the animals that are clinically examined. The referral practice shall be obliged to notify the primary practice of all procedures and treatments on such animals within 72 hours.

- 11.** Where a practice provides a veterinary service that is limited either in availability, or in the range of service offered, then the CPPR only exists for an animal that has been clinically examined immediately prior to the provision of any veterinary treatment or procedure being carried out. Such a practice shall be obliged to have a prior arrangement in place to co-ordinate its service with the practice with the established CPPR as in 1 above.

Definitions

1. Animal Owner:

A member of the public who owns at least one animal. Animals may be owned privately such as companion pets and horses, or commercially such as farms, competition animals or dog breeding establishments. An owner may delegate responsibility for their animal(s) to a named keeper(s).

2. Primary veterinary service:

The 24/7 provision of acts of veterinary medicine and surgery for animals owned by the general public.

3. Client-Patient-Practice-Relationship

An agreement between an animal owner (or a keeper) and a veterinary practitioner(s) within a veterinary practice to provide veterinary services that demonstrate real and ongoing veterinary/animal contact rather than distant, nominal or bureaucratic veterinary input.

4. Veterinary Practice:

A trading entity through which registered veterinary practitioners provide a veterinary service to members of the public.