

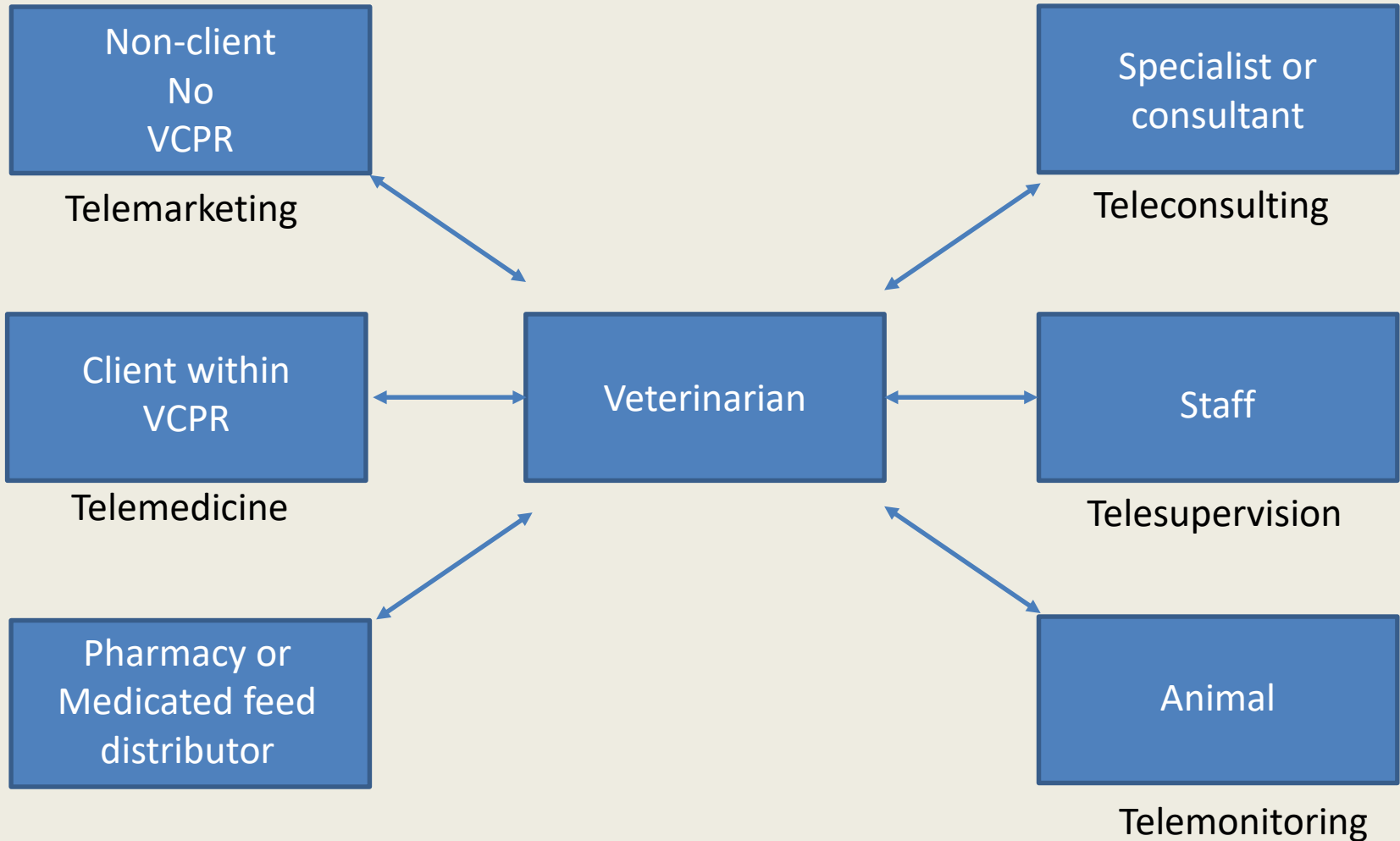


**Veterinary
Practitioners
Board**

Technology based patient consultations in veterinary science

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Telehealth¹



Definitions

Telemedicine has been defined as ‘the remote delivery of healthcare services, such as health assessments or consultations, over the telecommunications infrastructure’.²

Telemedicine is the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by means of telecommunications technology.³ Telemedicine does not include consultation between veterinary surgeons in which colleagues in different physical locations consult remotely with each other.³

Technology-based patient consultations are patient consultations that use any form of technology, including, but not restricted to videoconferencing, internet and telephone,⁴ for the purpose of diagnosing the physiological or pathological condition of an animal.⁵



Restricted acts of veterinary science

- The *Veterinary Practice Regulation 2013* (NSW) (cl 4(1)(a)) declares that the examination of or attendance on any animal for the purpose of diagnosing the physiological or pathological condition of the animal.
- Technology-based patient consultations provide for the virtual attendance on an animal patient and accordingly a telemedicine consultation is considered to be a restricted act of veterinary science in NSW.



Restricted acts of veterinary

- The key challenge for veterinarians, clients and regulators is defining where the restricted act of veterinary science took place:
 - Location of the animal patient
 - Location of the veterinarian
- The Board's opinion is that it takes place at both the above locations and therefore the veterinarian must be registered in each jurisdiction (if different) and must comply with the relevant laws of each jurisdiction

Registration

Jurisdiction	National Recognition of Veterinary Registration	Additional Requirements
Australian Capital Territory	Yes	Professional Indemnity Insurance
New South Wales	Yes	
Northern Territory	No	
Queensland	Yes	Approved veterinary premises
South Australia	Yes	Professional Indemnity Insurance
Tasmania	Yes	
Victoria	Yes	
Western Australia	No	

Application of the Code of Conduct

The Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct⁶ consists of 21 clauses and the main clauses affecting the delivery of technology-based patient consultations include:

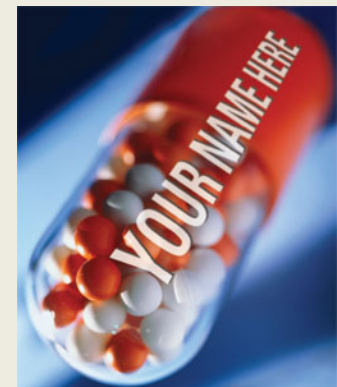
- Knowledge of current standards
- Utilisation of skills of colleagues
- Informed consent
- Availability for ongoing care
- Confidentiality
- Records
- Fees for veterinary services
- Supply of restricted substances
- Inducements



Application of the Code of Conduct

Supply of restricted substances

- A veterinarian may supply restricted substances (Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 in the Poisons List) only for the care of an animal he or she has physically examined or has under his or her direct care and only in respect of that animal (cl 20):
 - A veterinarian may supply restricted substances to a client after a technology-based patient consultation if the veterinarian has previously performed a physical examination on the animal and prescribed a restricted substance for the treatment of the animal, and is continuing this treatment for the previously diagnosed condition in accordance with current standards



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Supply of restricted substances

- A veterinarian may supply restricted substances (Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 in the Poisons List) only for the care of an animal he or she has physically examined or has under his or her direct care and only in respect of that animal (cl 20):
 - Animals are considered to be under the direct care of a veterinarian if the veterinarian has visited the property where these animals are kept, is fully aware of husbandry and management conditions and has physically examined sufficient animals from this property in order to establish a therapeutic need for supplying restricted substances to an animal from this property in accordance with current standards. A technology-based patient consultation may be used to continue treatment for animals under the direct care of a veterinarian



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Supply of restricted substances

- A veterinarian may supply restricted substances (Schedule 4 or Schedule 8 in the Poisons List) only for the care of an animal he or she has physically examined or has under his or her direct care and only in respect of that animal (cl 20):
 - If the veterinarian has not previously physically examined the animal, is not able to demonstrate the animal is under his or her direct care and concludes that restricted substances are required to treat an animal after performing a technology-based patient consultation the veterinarian must either perform a physical examination or refer the client to another veterinarian for this purpose



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Knowledge of current standards

- The veterinarian must assess the patient's condition, based on history and clinical signs and perform an appropriate examination. The veterinarian must determine whether a physical examination is necessary in order to formulate a diagnosis and provide appropriate advice, recommendations and treatment in accordance with current standards
- The veterinarian must ensure that the proposed treatment is not contraindicated. This particularly applies to technology-based patient consultations when the veterinarian may have a limited understanding of the patient's condition(s) and may not be able to access medical records



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Utilisation of skills of colleagues

- Veterinarians must appreciate the limitations of technology-based patient consultations and where appropriate utilise the skills of colleagues who may be in a better position to assist with management of the case by consultation or by offering referral for a face-to-face consultation (cl 5)



Application of the Code of Conduct

Informed consent

- Veterinarians must, where it is practicable to do so, obtain the informed consent of the person responsible for the care of the animal before providing a technology-based patient consultation (cl 7).
- Accordingly, veterinarians must take reasonable precautions to ensure the client is the person responsible for the care of the animal and must ensure the client is aware of the veterinarian's registration jurisdiction, registration number and where appropriate the authority or authorities to contact if there is a complaint



Application of the Code of Conduct

Availability to care for animal

- When accepting an animal for diagnosis or treatment using a technology-based patient consultation the veterinarian must ensure he or she is available for the ongoing care of the animal or if he or she is not available make arrangements for another veterinarian to take over the care of the animal (cl 8)



Application of the Code of Conduct

Confidentiality

- Veterinarians providing technology-based patient consultations must take reasonable precautions to protect client privacy and right to confidentiality (cl 12)



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Records

- Veterinarians providing technology-based patient consultations must ensure a detailed record of the consultation or treatment is made as soon as practicable, that it is legible, in sufficient detail to enable another veterinarian to continue treatment of the animal, and retained for at least 3 years.
- These records must specify that a technology-based patient consultation has been performed and the date it occurred. If the record is altered the alteration must be clearly identified in the record as such (cl 15)



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Application of the Code of Conduct

Inducements

- A veterinarian providing a technology-based patient consultation must not provide a referral or recommendation to a client the request for which is accompanied by any payment or other inducement to the veterinarian (cl 21).



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References

1. AVMA 2017, Final report on telemedicine, AVMA Practice Advisory Panel 13 January 2017. American Veterinary Medical Association.
2. AAVSB 2018, AAVSB Recommended guidelines for the appropriate use of telehealth technologies in the practice of veterinary medicine September 2018. American Association of Veterinary State Boards
3. VSBWA 2018, Guidelines on veterinary telemedicine 20 April 2018. Veterinary Surgeons' Board of Western Australia
4. MBA 2012, Technology based patient consultations 16 January 2012. Medical Board of Australia
5. VPBNSW 2019, Technology based patient consultations April 2019. Veterinary Practitioners Board of NSW
6. Veterinary Practice Regulation 2013, Schedule 2 Veterinary practitioners code of professional conduct. NSW Legislation