



Veterinary Surgeons' Board



Guidelines on Veterinary Telemedicine

PREAMBLE

The Board supports the adoption and utilisation of technology that can deliver positive healthcare results, including remote abilities.

However, a veterinary surgeon's existing legal and professional obligations are not altered when veterinary services are provided by telemedicine.

Persons registered with the Veterinary Surgeons' Board of Western Australia are expected to abide by the following basic principles when carrying out their professional duties:

- The primary concern of the profession is for the welfare of animals.
- At no time does the responsibility of a veterinary surgeon to relieve animals of suffering and provide for the health and welfare of animals release the veterinary surgeon from the overriding requirement to comply with the legislation governing the practice of veterinary surgery.
- All work performed by veterinary surgeons must be of an acceptable professional standard.
- Veterinary surgeons, individually, must act to promote cohesion within the profession and the trust of the profession by the general public.
- No personal advantage is permitted to be sought to the detriment of a professional colleague.¹

APPLICATION

These Guidelines apply from and including 20 April 2018.

These Guidelines may be superseded by subsequent versions. To ascertain whether this version has been superseded, view the current version on the Board's website at www.vsbwa.org.au

It is the responsibility of veterinary surgeons who utilise telemedicine technologies, to be conversant with the current version of these Guidelines.

DEFINITIONS

Telemedicine is the remote diagnosis and treatment of patients by means of telecommunications technology.

Telemedicine **does not** include consultation between veterinary surgeons in which colleagues in different physical locations consult remotely with each other.

Bona fide veterinary surgeon/client/patient relationship is defined to exist when

1. The veterinarian has assumed responsibility for making judgements regarding the health and welfare of the animal(s) and the need for treatment, with the owner's (client's) agreement;

¹Adapted from the Veterinary Surgeons' Handbook

2. The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of their medical condition. This means that the veterinarian has up to date knowledge of the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of a clinical examination, or by timely inspections of the premises and has assessed the general health of the animal(s) kept there; and
3. The veterinarian is available, or has advised the client where they can obtain emergency coverage, for follow-up evaluation in the event of an adverse reaction or failure of the treatment regimen.²

GUIDELINES FOR PROVIDING VETERINARY TELEMEDICINE SERVICES

Veterinary surgeons who diagnose and treat patients using remote technology must:

- Ensure that a bona fide veterinary surgeon/client/patient relationship has been established;
- Make a judgement about the appropriateness of a telemedicine based consultation and in particular whether a direct physical examination is necessary³ ;
- Assess the animal's condition based on history, clinical signs and appropriate examination;
- Accept the ultimate responsibility for evaluating information used in assessment and treatment, irrespective of its source. This applies to information gathered by a third party who may have taken a history for the animal or examined the animal; and
- Make a compliant clinical record for the examination and treatment of the animal.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In an emergency it may not be possible to practise according to these guidelines. If an alternative is not possible, a telemedicine consultation should be as thorough as possible until suitable arrangements can be made for the continuing care of the animal.

DISCLAIMER

This document (printed, electronic or any other medium) cannot be regarded as legal advice.

Although all care has been taken in preparing these Guidelines they do not replace advice specific to the reader's circumstances. Where necessary, advice must be sought from competent legal practitioners. Neither the authors nor the Veterinary Surgeons' Board of Western Australia accept or undertake any duty of care relating to any part of these Guidelines.

² Adapted from the Australian Veterinary Association Code of Professional Conduct

³ If a physical examination is necessary, the veterinary surgeon must not attempt to treat the animal by telemedicine and must arrange to examine the animal or refer the animal to another veterinary surgeon.