



Telemedicine

According to Massachusetts law, the practice of veterinary medicine requires the establishment of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR). Because the VCPR requires that the veterinarian “has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of an examination of the animal(s) and/or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept”, it is not possible to establish a valid VCPR solely by telephonic or other electronic means. For this reason, it is the position of the MVMA that telemedicine alone (in the absence of any direct examination) is not a legal practice, as VCPR cannot be adequately established.

Full definition of VCPR ([256 CMR 2.00: M.G.L. c. 112, §§ 54 and 54A](#))

Veterinarian-client Patient Relationship (VCPR) exists when:

- (a) The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal(s) and the need for medical treatment, and the client has agreed to follow the instructions of the veterinarian; and
- (b) There is sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) by the veterinarian to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal(s). This means the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of an examination of the animal(s) and/or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept; and
- (c) The practicing veterinarian is readily available for follow-up care in adverse reactions or failure of the regimen of therapy.

From the AVMA Model Veterinary Practice Act ([Section 5](#)):

No person may practice veterinary medicine in the State except within the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship.

A veterinarian-client-patient relationship cannot be established solely by telephonic or other electronic means.

COMMENTARY TO SECTION 5—This section, which was added in 2003, emphasizes not only that veterinary medicine must be practiced within the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR), but also emphasizes that because a VCPR requires the veterinarian to examine the patient, it cannot be adequately established by telephonic or other electronic means (i.e., via telemedicine) alone. However, once established, a VCPR may be able to be maintained between medically necessary examinations via telephone or other types of consultations.