

# NORTH CAROLINA VETERINARY MEDICAL BOARD

Tod J. Schadler, DVM  
Executive Director  
George G. Hearn  
Board Attorney



March 18, 2020

Susan K. Bull, DVM - President  
Waynesville  
Robin A. Lazaro, RVT - Vice President  
Raleigh  
R. Douglas Meckes, DVM - Secretary/Treasurer  
Raleigh  
William K. Dean, DVM  
Hope Mills  
Kim D. Gemeinhardt, DVM  
Germanton  
Azure D. Holland, DVM  
Raleigh  
Ronald J. Komich, DVM  
Greensboro  
Kristina J. Newman  
Statesville

## COVID-19 and The Practice of Veterinary Medicine in N.C.

The N.C. Veterinary Medical Board ("NCVMB") is aware of the upheaval the COVID-19 outbreak has caused to many veterinary practices, the industry, and to the public at large. By this statement the NCVMB hopes to clarify certain aspects of the delivery of veterinary services and to encourage an abundance of caution by you, your hospitals and in your personal lives as you deliver veterinary care to your patients.

The NCVMB is greatly indebted to the N.C. Veterinary Medical Association (NCVMA) and its officers and staff for their excellent advice and input in developing this statement.

Both the NCVMB and the NCVMA have received questions relating to the delivery of veterinary services during this COVID-19 outbreak. Some have asked whether "telemedicine" is permitted in North Carolina. For clarification, telemedicine is not yet allowed under the N.C. Veterinary Practice Act but recent legislative amendments gave the NCVMB the authority to develop administrative rules to define telemedicine and its use. The rules have been drafted and in the next few weeks will be presented to the Rules Review Commission for approval.

Nevertheless, even without formal telemedicine rules, quality care for patients can be provided under existing statutes and rules, but in doing so, veterinarians should take precautions when dealing with clients and animals that are sick.

### The Practice of Veterinary Medicine

Veterinarians must first establish a Veterinary-Client-Patient relationship (VCPR) when first treating a patient. The VCPR can only be established with the physical examination of the animal in question – it cannot be established over the phone, by Skype, email, or other online source. However, phone calls, texted or emailed pictures, Skype or other online sources can be very useful in advising clients about their pets' condition and the need for possible treatment. BUT, they cannot be used to diagnose patients.

The VCPR is defined in the Practice Act, G.S. § 90-181 (7a) as follows:

(7a) "Veterinarian-client-patient relationship" means that:

a. The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal and the need for medical treatment, and the client (owner or other caretaker) has agreed to follow the instruction of the veterinarian.

b. There is sufficient knowledge of the animal by the veterinarian to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal. This means that the veterinarian has **recently seen and is personally acquainted with** the keeping and care of the animal by virtue of an examination of the animal, or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal is kept.

c. The practicing veterinarian is readily available or provides for follow-up in case of adverse reactions or failure of the regimen of therapy.

#### Further Advice for Dealing with Sick Owners or Sick Animals

The following is drawn from information from the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

If the animal needs to be seen in person, the ill owner should have a healthy family member or friend bring their sick animal to a veterinary hospital or clinic.

Consider meeting clients with ill animals at their cars, rather than having them bring those animals into your waiting room. When meeting clients, as a precaution, veterinary team members should wear appropriate protective equipment. This should reduce risk for both veterinary team members and clients, as human-to-human contact is still believed to be the primary mode of transmission of the virus.

Mobile and house call veterinarians can consider examining animals in their vehicle, outside, or seeking the assistance of a local clinic. If mobile or house call veterinarians must examine an animal in a home where someone is ill with COVID-19 and no other options are available, they should consult with local public health officials for guidance. Appropriate protective equipment should be considered in all cases, and mobile and house call veterinarians should ensure they have access to handwashing and disinfection materials.

#### Additional Information on NCVMB Website

Please also review information on the NCVMB website regarding continuing education requirements; additional information regarding the practice of veterinary medicine; and further information from the AVMA regarding COVID-19.

Susan K. Bull, DVM  
President  
N.C. Veterinary Medical Board