VETS TO PETS: HOUSE CALL SERVICE

Attn: Stephen J. Boese, Executive Secretary, & The New York Board of Veterinary Medicine

1. In Section 5.10 of the New York Veterinary Guidelines, a Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (hereby referred to as "VCPR") is defined as "The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the patient with the assent of the owner of the animal or their duly authorized agent.

2. The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the patient to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the patient. This means that the veterinarian is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the patient by virtue of:
   a. a timely examination of the patient by the veterinarian, or
   b. medically appropriate and timely visits by the veterinarian to the operation where the patient is managed, or
   c. medically appropriate and timely visits by the patient to the veterinary facility where the veterinarian is working.

3. The veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation and oversight of treatment and outcomes, or has arranged for appropriate continuing care and treatment.

4. Patient records are maintained.

We would like to propose an amendment to the regulations on a VCPR to include the ability to establish a VCPR virtually via video-chat when indicated.

According to the AVMA, there were 48,255,413 dogs and 31,896,077 cats owned as companion animals as of 2018. (See 2017-2018 Edition AVMA PET OWNERSHIP AND DEMOGRAPHICS SOURCEBOOK-and AVMA > Reports > U.S. Pet Ownership Statistics). That equates to 80,151,490 pets in the United States.

Per the AVMA, there were 118,624 veterinarians in the United States as of January 2021 (see AVMA > Reports > U.S. veterinarians 2020).

If the number of pets was evenly distributed between all of the veterinarians, this would equate to approximately 675 patients per veterinarian per year. This is not to mention the surge of pet ownership during the COVID-19 crisis, with the ASPCA noting that an additional 23 million American households acquired a pet during the COVID-19 crisis as of May 2021. (See ASPCA > Press Releases > New ASPCA Survey Shows Overwhelming Majority of Dogs and Cats Acquired During the Pandemic Are Still in Their Homes).
This is what has lead us to address this issue with the Board of Veterinary Medicine. The ability to establish a VCPR electronically would mean that more pets would be able to be kept from the emergency clinics, allowing them to handle emergent cases while a veterinarian could triage and treat pets from a distance. This would also help protect our veterinarians from illness and death related to the COVID-19 crisis.

The proposed amendment would also allow a better work/life balance for many veterinarians as so many are staying in the office late and working overtime due to the increase in pet ownership and overall longer appointment time due to pandemic procedures. Allowing TeleMedicine could allow more veterinarians to take charge of their lives and prevent future burnout by allowing them to have more control over their schedule.

Additionally, as appointment times are longer due to pandemic procedures, the wait time to get into a general practice can be weeks, even months. Many veterinary clinics are holding some slots each day to take emergency cases as there is sometimes not any space left in many emergency veterinary hospitals. This leaves things like ear infections, nutrition and behavior counseling, skin issues, and general care getting pushed further and further back. This care could be optimized and done within a reasonable timeframe via TeleMedicine.

We acknowledge that nothing will ever replace a hands-on physical examination, and that will not ever be our intention. However, during the continuing crisis plaguing this industry and the United States, we see this as a reasonable accommodation to continue making the world a better place for veterinarians and pet owners.

We look forward to hearing from you in the future and hope you will take our request into consideration.

With appreciation,

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