

# The Value of a Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship

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Many animal producers have a veterinarian who can be called in cases of emergency, but this may not be enough to allow for establishment of a true Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR). A VCPR serves as the basis for the working relationship between veterinarians and producers and allows for not only proper drug use, but also continuous improvement in management to improve animal health and productivity.

A VCPR in the context of herd health indicates that there is ongoing communication between the animal owners/managers and the veterinarian(s) overseeing the health of that animal population, and should be considered a part of the business partnership between the veterinarian and the producer.

As a production animal veterinarian, my goals are to reduce animal disease and to maximize animal production through sound herd health management. In most instances, this will help to ensure that producers maximize profits and are able to re-invest into their production systems.

By understanding the individual production system and goals as well as being familiar with limitations that may be present, your veterinarian may be able to identify methods to reduce the risk of disease and subsequent negative outcomes and reliance on antimicrobials.

In some states, the definition of a VCPR is regulated by the state veterinary practice act or the Federal Register. The American Veterinary Medical Association considers that a VCPR is established by mutual agreement between the producer and the veterinarian and encompasses, at a minimum, these basic principles:

- 1. The veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making clinical judgments regarding the health of the patient(s) and the client has agreed to follow the veterinarian's instructions.**
- 2. The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the patient(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the patient(s). This means that the veterinarian is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the patient(s) by virtue of a timely examination of the patient by the veterinarian, or medically appropriate and timely visits by the veterinarian to the operation where the patient is managed.**
- 3. The veterinarian is readily available for follow-up evaluation or has arranged for the following: veterinary emergency coverage, and continuing care and treatment.**
- 4. The veterinarian provides oversight of treatment, compliance, and outcome.**
- 5. Patient records are maintained.**

Over the last ten years, there have been numerous changes regarding the availability and utilization of antibiotics with almost all medications moved to a prescription or Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) status. While this has led to understandable frustration by producers, it should also be considered an important step to protect the future availability and efficacy of many drug classes for human use.

As we have been able to adopt newer diagnostic technology and research into antimicrobial resistance has advanced, we are finding that the spread of antibiotic resistance is much more complicated than previously believed and resistance to once class of antibiotics, may also indicate that the bacteria of concern may have resistance genes to multiple antibiotic classes.

This shift in access to pharmaceutical products is a good opportunity to establish or reaffirm a VCPR that will help ensure the long-term profitability of your operation. Having a regular visit by a veterinarian may also provide an independent set of eyes to help identify areas of improvement not related to pharmaceuticals, but perhaps in reproductive efficiency, calf health, mastitis prevention, or worker safety. I recommend that you work with your veterinarian to clearly define what the VCPR means in the context of your operation, and to consider putting this in writing and reviewing it on an annual basis.



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