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VVMA Position Statement

Veterinary Dentistry

Approved by VVMA Executive Board November 2012 after member comment period.

Purpose: This position statement confirms that the practice of veterinary dentistry falls within the scope of the practice of veterinary medicine. It also outlines expectations and requirements for professional oversight, supervision and delegation as well as follow up care, record keeping, anesthesia and equipment.

Scope: This position statement applies to the practice of veterinary dentistry in Vermont.

Position Statement

General: Veterinary dentistry requires both diagnosis and treatment of stages of periodontal disease or other conditions to be effective. As such, veterinary dentistry should only be practiced in Vermont by licensed veterinarians. A veterinarian practicing dentistry in Vermont may be assisted by an appropriately trained veterinary technician under the direct supervision of said veterinarian. Veterinary dentistry includes the maintenance or repair of proper oral health through: scaling and polishing, adjustment, extraction, power-assisted filing or power-assisted floating, or repair of animals' teeth (not including simple brushing). It also includes any medical or surgical treatment performed within the oral cavity. The practice of veterinary dentistry requires extensive knowledge of anatomy, analgesia, anesthesiology, pharmacology, physiology, pathology, radiology, neurology, medicine, and surgery, all of which is acquired during the course of veterinary training. Only a properly trained and licensed veterinarian is fully equipped to recognize and address the possible complications, unexpected conditions or diseases that may arise during the examination or treatment portion of the practice of veterinary dentistry. Veterinarians who perform dentistry in Vermont are obligated to stay current with evolving professional standards and techniques.

Supervision: Veterinarians who offer veterinary dentistry in Vermont may choose to delegate some of the service provided to a veterinary technician under direct supervision. Ultimately, the supervising veterinarian is responsible for the well-being of the patient and must remain on the same premises in order to supervise the veterinary technician properly. Only a licensed veterinarian may perform the examination necessary to assess the patient, develop a diagnosis and formulate a treatment plan. The veterinary technician may then be directed to perform a procedure that falls within the veterinary technician's abilities but the veterinarian is still responsible for that individual's actions and must re-examine the entire oral cavity of the animal upon completion of the veterinary technician's activities to ensure that the veterinary technician has properly performed the procedure. Any person performing veterinary dentistry in Vermont without the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian will be considered to be practicing veterinary medicine without a license. Dental extractions fall within the definition of surgical procedures and as such can only be performed by a licensed veterinarian.

Titles: The use of the title veterinary dentist, equine dentist, veterinary or equine dental technician or any other similar title by a layperson should be contrary to the existing practice act. It is improper for any person who is not a licensed veterinarian to use a term, title or description that would lead a member of the public to believe or assume otherwise. Likewise the terms dentist, dental surgeon and the associated abbreviations should be protected under Vermont law and should not to be used by any veterinarian except in cases of appropriate board certification.

VCPR: Veterinary dentistry, as per other areas of veterinary practice, requires a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship. If a veterinarian does not provide dental services, he or she should recommend referral to a licensed colleague who does practice veterinary dentistry if the animal's condition warrants it. The owner may seek another veterinarian who does perform these services or ask for a referral from their primary care veterinarian.

Informed Owner Consent: Dental procedures should not be performed on an animal without first obtaining informed consent from the owner or owner's agent. Clients should be informed about the professional status of who will be performing the dental service. As part of informed consent, the owner should also be advised that unexpected findings often occur and that it is important to provide accurate contact information to the veterinarian in case consent for additional treatment is required during a procedure.

Medical Records: Veterinarians are advised that quality medical-dental care for animals requires clear and complete medical records. When an animal is referred for dental treatment to another veterinarian, communication and coordination between the primary care veterinarian and that veterinarian is mandatory. Records, including relevant medical history, must be shared as appropriate between any veterinarian performing referral dentistry and the primary care veterinarian. In Vermont, the client has right to access any and all medical records regardless of outstanding balances or other issues that may damage the veterinary client relationship.

Radiographs: If radiographs are taken to diagnose or monitor disease progress it is important they are clearly labeled with: the veterinarian and/or facility name; animal identification; date; and indication of the left or right side; and if a sequential study is performed, an indication of elapsed time would be required. Having this imprinted on the radiograph via the emulsion is best for film radiographs but external marking methods are also acceptable.

Follow Up Care: Any veterinarian performing dental procedures on an animal in Vermont must remain available for consultation with the owner and for re-assessment of said animal on completion of the service for a reasonable period of time. The treating veterinarian needs to provide the client with the name of who to contact in the event of an emergency related to the dental procedure after such time has elapsed, and this should be coordinated beforehand. In the case where the treating veterinarian is not the primary-care veterinarian, the former must ensure that the latter is informed of the service performed, the outcome, and what procedures should be followed in case of emergency.

Anesthesia: The cleaning and scaling of the teeth of companion animals must be performed under general anesthesia with the use of an endotracheal tube with an inflated cuff in order to meet acceptable standards of care for veterinarians practicing in Vermont. Vascular access should be available via an intravenous catheter and intravenous fluid therapy is considered a minimum standard for a patient under general anesthesia for dentistry procedures.

Equipment: While the minimum standards do not include specific specifications for dental equipment in treatment areas, the State of Vermont expects that any veterinarian performing veterinary dentistry will use the appropriate equipment as per generally accepted standards of care and that this equipment will be maintained in such a way as to prevent the transmission of disease between animals.