

Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR)

The veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) is the basis for interaction among veterinarians, their clients, and their patients and is critical to the health of the animal.

A Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship, or VCPR for short, exists when the veterinarian knows a patient well enough to be able to diagnose and treat any medical conditions the pet develops. The client's part of the VCPR is allowing the veterinarian to take responsibility for making clinical judgments about the pet's health, asking questions to make sure they understand, and following the veterinarian's instructions. The veterinarian's part of the VCPR involves making those judgments; accepting the responsibility for providing the patient with medical care; keeping a written record of the patient's medical care; advising the client about the benefits and risks of different treatment options; providing oversight of treatment, compliance (the clients follow-through on their recommendations) and outcome; and helping the client know how to get emergency care for your pet if the need should arise.

A VCPR is established only when the veterinarian examines the patient in person, and is maintained by regular veterinary visits as needed to monitor the animal's health. If a VCPR is established but the veterinarian does not regularly see the pet afterward, the VCPR is no longer valid and it would be illegal and unethical for the veterinarian to dispense or prescribe medications or recommend treatment without recently examining the pet.

A valid VCPR cannot be established online, via email, or over the phone. However, once a VCPR is established, it may be able to be maintained between medically necessary examinations via telephone or other types of consultations; but it's up to the veterinarian's discretion to determine if this is appropriate and in the best interests of the animals' health.

Why is this important? For one, it's required by law in the state of Virginia— in order for a veterinarian to diagnose or treat the animal, or prescribe or dispense medications; a VCPR must be in effect according to Virginia's State's Veterinary Practice Act. Two, it's the best thing for the animal's health. The veterinarian should be familiar with the animal's medical history and keep a written record of the animal's health so they can provide the animal with the best possible care. Neither Virginia or the Federal government specify what constitutes as “regular” veterinary visits are. The Doctors of Ballston Animal Hospital follow the recommendations set forth by the American Veterinary Medical Association and require annual (every 12 months) exams to maintain a valid VCPR. Some medications also require routine monitoring to ensure that they are working as prescribed and/or not causing harmful side effects and it is up to the Doctors of each practice to determine what monitoring is necessary. The client can terminate a VCPR at any time by notifying the veterinarian. If the veterinarian chooses to end the VCPR, they should notify the client and, if the animal has an ongoing illness, provide medical care until you have transitioned to another veterinarian.