Prescriptions and Valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationships

Questions are frequently raised regarding a veterinarian’s responsibilities for prescriptions. The first requirement is a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship, which exists only when a veterinarian has examined the animal. One exception is livestock, for which the veterinarian must be acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal’s group by virtue of medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal is kept. By writing a prescription, the veterinarian assumes responsibility for making medical judgments for the animal, and the client must agree to follow the veterinarian’s instructions. The veterinarian has to be available for consultation in case of adverse reactions or failure of the regimen of therapy. The prescription must be recorded in the medical record. This means that if an animal’s owner requests prescription heartworm medication for a dog you have not examined, you should decline.

You can legally write prescriptions to be filled in another state if requested, but that pharmacy must be licensed to ship medication into Minnesota.

You can check whether a pharmacy has a MN license on the Board of Pharmacy’s website: www.pharmacy.state.mn.us

If you have a regularly seen patient that requires ongoing medication, but runs out while travelling with its owner out of state, you can also write a prescription to a pharmacy in that other state. Remember, there are 9 different pieces of information that must be included on the prescription: Minnesota Statutes 156.18

Reminder: A licensed doctor of veterinary medicine, in the course of professional practice only and not for use by a human being, may personally prescribe, administer, and dispense a legend drug, and may cause the same to be administered or dispensed by an assistant under the doctor’s direction and supervision. (MS 151.37, subd. 3)

Tramadol Abuse Alert

Tramadol (Ultram) is a synthetic opiate-like agonist that also inhibits reuptake of serotonin and norepinephrine. Although not currently considered a controlled substance by the Drug Enforcement Agency, it can be addictive and impair a person’s ability to act responsibly. The FDA-approved labeling for tramadol has this warning: “This drug may make you dizzy or drowsy. Do not drive, use machinery, or do any activity that requires alertness until you are sure you can perform such activities safely. Avoid alcoholic beverages”. It is certainly possible that abuse of tramadol may cause physical and mental impairment and that, in turn, could affect the ability to practice. These negative effects are exacerbated by concurrent alcohol consumption.

The MN Board of Pharmacy is pursuing legislation to define tramadol as a controlled substance in Minnesota. Doctor shopping is happening to falsely obtain tramadol for a pet’s ailment for the person’s consumption. Tramadol addiction has been reported in veterinarians in MN, who have been taking tramadol from the clinic’s supply as well as writing false prescriptions to obtain tramadol for their own use. Please be aware of these dangers and take the same precautions as with a controlled drug.

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Members were chosen to represent the spectrum of veterinary practice in Minnesota and include 2 members of the Board of Veterinary Medicine, 3 members of the MVMA, 1 veterinary technician and 1 public member. After identifying the issues, looking at other veterinary practice acts, and much discussion, the key question remains whether we should license this important segment of our industry. The majority of those impacted needs to be supportive of this change if it is to be adopted by the legislature. We must also be prepared to persuade legislators that this choice will benefit the public as well as their animals.

How will your opinion and that of veterinary technicians be considered? First, that opinion needs to be voiced. You can write or send an e-mail to vet.med@state.mn.us right now. The task force will also solicit opinions via a very short survey in the near future, but you must participate if the resultant data is going to be representative of the wishes of the profession.