

Ask A Vet: Establishing a Valid VCPR

Sunday, February 26, 2017

Dear Dr. Weldy's,

We recently needed antibiotics for our horse and so we went to our local veterinarian's office. The staff there said they could not sell us prescription medications because our veterinarian had not seen our horses in over a year. Is this true? Why can't they help us out?

Dear Reader,

All veterinary practices in the United States are required to dispense prescription medications only when a valid Veterinary-Client-Patient relationship (VCPR) has been established. This usually, but not always, means that your animal has been examined by your veterinarian within the last 12 months. A valid VCPR means that your veterinarian knows your horse or other animal well enough to be able to diagnose and treat medical conditions that may develop. This will usually mean he/she has examined the animal in order to come up with the correct diagnosis and treatment. Your commitment to the relationship is to provide as thorough a history of the situation as possible, ask questions that will help you understand what is going on with your horse, and take good faith measures to follow your veterinarian's instructions.

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 examinations via telephone, texting or email; 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 Indiana – in order for a veterinarian to diagnose or treat the animal, or prescribe or dispense medications; a VCPR must be in effect according to Indiana 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. The goal is not to put up roadblocks to treatment, but to ensure that each animal has access to the best diagnostic and therapeutic options. The best way to accomplish this is to have your veterinarian involved in your animal's health care.

-Dr. Wade Hammond