

Health & Husbandry

Build a relationship with your veterinarian.

by Brad White, Kansas State University Beef Cattle Institute



Healthy relationships are mutually beneficial and require good communication. Building and maintaining business relationships requires effort, and finding the correct people to offer input to your operation is important.

One important connection for cattle health is with your veterinarian. This relationship has a specific term: veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR). A valid VCPR is important in several areas, including prescribing specific pharmaceutical products.

What's included?

The VCPR can be described in broad terms as an ongoing relationship between a licensed veterinarian providing animal health oversight and the client owning and

maintaining the animals. Specific definitions of VCPR vary by state, but the federal definition includes three main components (quoted from electronic *Code of Federal Regulations Title 21, Chapter 1, Subchapter E Part 530*):

- ▶ A veterinarian has assumed the responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of (an) animal(s) and the need for medical treatment, and the client (the owner of the animal or animals or other caretaker) has agreed to follow the instructions of the veterinarian;
- ▶ There is sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) by the veterinarian to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of the medical condition of the animal(s); and
- ▶ The practicing veterinarian is readily available for follow-up in case of adverse reactions or failure of the regimen of therapy. Such a relationship can exist only when the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal(s) by virtue of examination of the animal(s), and/or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept.

In other words, the veterinarian is qualified through training, knowledge of the operation, and ability to perform follow-up. Therefore, the veterinarian can provide valuable input to the operation. A valid VCPR is required

for many activities, including prescribing certain medications and completing forms such as the veterinary feed directive.

Depending on the production system, maintaining an active VCPR may include in-person visits at a regular frequency and discussions about operational needs. Building this relationship prior to the necessity of an animal health intervention is often more efficient for both the producer and the veterinarian.

Common components of a valid VCPR may include a written agreement between client and veterinarian;

documentation of the veterinarian of record for the operation; the provision of treatment protocols; collection and maintenance of written or electronic treatment records; and maintaining appropriate handling of prescription products, including usage

guidelines and withdrawal periods.

One key theme of maintaining a good VCPR is appropriate documentation of specific treatment protocols and other health records. The veterinarian does not have to administer all of the prescribed products, but the veterinarian should outline a therapeutic plan, including when, where and to which animals treatments may be administered, along with information for the appropriate slaughter (and milk) withdrawal periods.

Establishing a valid VCPR is straightforward and is often initiated through an on-site visit and discussion of the operational needs. Farm visits are not required to occur at a predetermined frequency. However, the veterinarian should be able to provide guidance on how often visits should occur.

Value of VCPR

The value of a good VCPR extends well beyond the ability to provide prescription drugs. One big benefit is having an external viewpoint on the operation. Many of us have experienced taking our children to a family reunion and relatives commenting on how much the children have grown and changed. These changes are much harder to detect when we see our children daily.

A similar phenomenon happens in your operation. Daily

Continued on page 28

activities and observations today are like yesterday, and it is very challenging to notice subtle changes. A veterinary visit can provide an opportunity to have an external view of the operation, which can be a good starting point for discussions on how to improve animal health and production.

Because scheduled visits are not based on an emergency or sick animal, this also allows the discussion focus to be on disease-prevention techniques.

Part of a team

The VCPR can also be leveraged to be part of a larger process building a long-term strategy for your production system. While the strategy shouldn't change frequently, there should be time to evaluate and potentially modify the plan as needed.

Beef production operations are complex systems, with many areas of expertise required to function successfully. While the strategy team may not need to meet as a single unit, it may be appropriate to have relationships with a

The veterinarian does not have to administer all of the prescribed products, but the veterinarian should outline a therapeutic plan, including when, where and to which animals treatments may be administered.

veterinarian, nutritionist, accountant, risk management expert, geneticist, grazing specialist and lawyer. Building this expert panel proactively allows you to focus on continuous improvement for the operation.

Conclusions

The VCPR is a potential value to your cattle production operation. Choose a veterinarian who can provide information that suits your operational goals, and engage them to help identify areas for potential improvement. Beyond the VCPR you may also want to assemble an expert panel that can provide you information on multiple aspects of your operation. **ABB**

Editor's note: Author Brad White is on faculty at the Kansas State University College of Veterinary Medicine and serves as director of the Beef Cattle Institute. To learn more on this and other beef herd health topics, tune in to the weekly Beef Cattle Institute *Cattle Chat* and *Bovine Science with BCI* podcasts available on iTunes, GooglePlay or directly from <https://ksubci.org/>.