



CONSUMER NEWS

SAN DIEGO CITY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

Veterinary Care

December 2011

Many people consider pets members of the family. As with their human counterparts, quality healthcare is important to pets. While veterinary care may provide health benefits and a better quality of life, inappropriate care provided by unqualified individuals may cause more harm than good.

This newsletter will provide some helpful information on how to pick the proper veterinary care for your pet.

VETERINARIANS MUST BE LICENSED BY THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA:

California state law makes it unlawful for any person to practice veterinary medicine in this state unless he/she is licensed by the Veterinary Medical Board. A person practices veterinary medicine if he or she does any of the following:

- Represents himself or herself as engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine;
- Provides a diagnosis;
- Prescribes or administers drugs, medicine, or treatment;
- Administers anesthesia with the purpose of rendering the pet unconscious;
- Performs dental surgery, or uses any instrument on the pet's gums or teeth other than cotton swabs, gauze, dental floss, dentifrice, toothbrushes, or similar items; or
- Uses any words, letters, or titles to induce the belief that he or she is engaged in the practice of veterinary medicine.

Any person who practices veterinary medicine without a license is guilty of a misdemeanor, and may be

subject to a fine, imprisonment, or both.

A REGISTERED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN MAY PERFORM CERTAIN TASKS UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF A LICENSED VETERINARIAN:

Registered veterinary technicians are skilled nursing professionals who have passed the Board's licensing requirements. After an examination by a licensed veterinarian, the veterinarian may delegate certain tasks to the registered veterinary technician.

Under direct supervision, a registered veterinary technician may:

- Administers anesthesia with the purpose of rendering the pet unconscious;
- Apply casts and splits;
- Perform dental extractions;

- Suture certain wounds; and
- Create a relief hole in the skin for the placement of an intravascular catheter.

The supervising veterinarian must be present on premises and be quickly and easily available in order for there to be direct supervision.

Under indirect supervision, a registered veterinary technician may:

- Operate radiographic equipment;
- Draw blood and run lab tests;
- Apply or change bandages; and
- Administer medications.

For a technician to be under indirect supervision, the supervising veterinarian does not have to be physically present on premises. However, the registered veterinary technician must have direct orders for treatment of the animal patient.

THE PREMISES MUST BE REGISTERED:

By California state law, all premises where veterinary medicine is practiced must be registered with the Veterinary Medical Board. The Veterinary Medical Board has an inspection program where it conducts both random and complaint driven inspections of veterinary offices. Some of the most common violations observed during inspections are:

- Failure to remove outdated drugs from the premises;
- Failure to maintain sanitary conditions;
- Failure to maintain a surgery log; and
- Improper preparation of surgical packs.

TIPS:

Before making an appointment, make sure your pet's veterinarian is licensed and in good standing. The Veterinary Medical Board allows consumers to check the license status for veterinarians, registered veterinary technicians, and veterinary hospitals at their website. (<http://www.vmb.ca.gov/consumers/licverif.shtml>)

At the veterinary care facility, observe the environment. Does it look clean? Fixed veterinary offices are required by law to be kept clean and sanitary at all times. In addition, they must have an examination room separate from other areas of the facility large enough to accommodate the doctor, doctor's assistant, pet patient, and client. Similarly, mobile clinics must have hot and cold water, a 110 volt power source, and adequate lighting.

PET GROOMERS:

In California, pet groomers do not need to be licensed by the Veterinary Medical Board. However, they do need to be licensed or under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian if the groomer:

- Administers anesthesia to render the pet unconscious during the grooming;
- Uses an instrument other than cotton, gauze, dental floss, toothbrushes, dentifrice, or similar items to clean pet teeth. For example, a dental scaler can only be used by or under the supervision of a licensed veterinarian; or
- Performs any action classified as veterinary medicine such as provide a diagnosis.

TIPS:

Pet groomers are not licensed by the Veterinary Medical Board so it is up to pet owners to make sure groomers are competent.

- Ask your veterinarian or other trusted sources for a recommendation.
- Look up the groomer at the Better Business Bureau website to see if there are any complaints. (<http://www.bbb.org>)
- Ask your groomer about his/her training. Does the groomer work alone or under the supervision of a veterinarian? This will determine what kind of services he/she is able to perform.
- Be clear about the services you are receiving. Remember, only registered veterinarians or supervised registered veterinary technicians can administer

anesthesia, use a scaler to clean teeth, or provide a diagnosis for any conditions.

COMPLAINTS:

Complaints can be filed with the Veterinary Medical Board regarding the conduct of licensed/registered personnel, unlicensed/unregistered personnel practicing veterinary medicine, or conditions in a veterinary facility. Complaint forms can be downloaded online at http://www.vmb.ca.gov/forms_pubs/vet_complaint.pdf or requested by calling (916) 263 - 2610.

ENFORCEMENT:

The City Attorney's Office handles cases referred to it by the Veterinary Medical Board.

**San Diego
City Attorney's Office
Consumer and Environmental
Protection Unit
(619) 533-5600**

This newsletter was written by City Attorney Intern Stacey Kim.

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Sources: California Code of Regulations 2030 et. seq., and 2034 et. seq.; Business and Professions 4825, 4821, and 4853; California Veterinary Medical Board publications *What You Need to Know*, *Protect your Pet*, *Who's who in the Veterinary Office*, *Consultant's Corner: Premise Inspection Program*; and the Veterinary Medical Board Website.

The information provided in this newsletter is intended to convey general information and is not intended to be relied upon as legal advice.

To report violations of consumer protection laws, call the City Attorney's Hotline at **(619) 533-5600**.