

The Danish Veterinary Association's policy paper regarding veterinarian's use of veterinary telemedicine in Denmark.

The Danish Veterinary Association's (DVA) policy paper is intended to form the basis for *positions/opinions* expressed by representatives of the DVA on behalf of the association.

The text below therefore reflects the DVA's opinion on this subject, and not necessarily the status, agreements, or legal possibilities at the present time.

Background

The appliance of telemedicine is increasing in the human sector and the same trend is now showing in veterinary medicine, where several companies offer telemedicine consultations.

In May 2020, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) distributed a survey among member organizations on the appliance of veterinary telemedicine during the COVID-19 pandemic. 17 countries responded to the survey which indicated that the veterinarians in each country used telemedicine to consult existing clients' animals as well as triage of patients in the clinic.

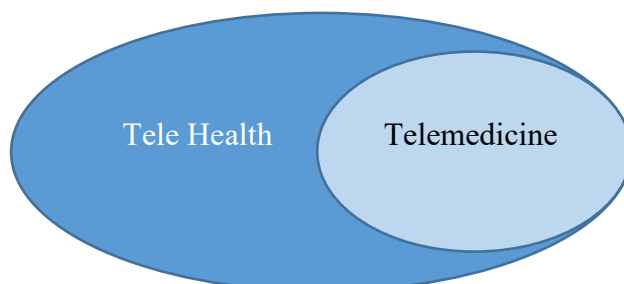
Definitions

The definition of tele health

Tele health is defined as:

- All use of technology developed to provide health information, education, or external care.

Tele health is not a specific service but a collection of tools. It includes both telemedicine and general counseling. The concept of tele health is based on the patient and their overall needs.



Examples

Services within tele health can, for example, be to assist the animal owner in the post-operative rehabilitation of his animal, nutritional advice such as for the prevention of lifestyle diseases in animals, monitoring of chronically ill animals in the home and ill animals in herds and maybe animal fitness before transport etc.

The definition of veterinary telemedicine

A universally accepted definition of veterinary telemedicine is yet to be defined.

The Danish Veterinary Association has decided on the following definition of veterinary telemedicine.

Veterinary telemedicine are services that use information and communication technology as a **supplement** to or **replacement** of the physical meeting between the patient and the veterinary professional.

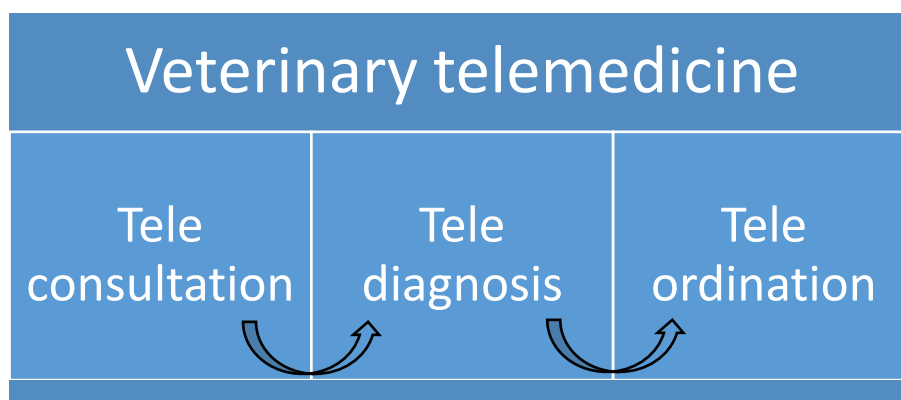
This does not include communication between health care professionals such as between one veterinarian and a second opinion veterinarian.

The situation where a veterinarian or another health care professional consults about a specific patient is thus not covered by the definition of veterinary telemedicine when it does not replace a physical meeting between the patient and the healthcare professional.

The crucial point is that technology makes patients and health care professionals independent of a physical meeting. Thus, veterinary telemedicine can also be a supplement to non-telemedicine treatments but only if it makes the participants independent of a physical meeting.

According to the DVA, the term “veterinary telemedicine” contains the following elements:

- Tele consultation (which replaces or supplements a physical meeting between patient and health care professional, cf. above)
- Tele diagnosis (a diagnosis is based on the tele consultation)
- Tele prescription (treatment prescribed by a veterinarian)



These elements are addressed by the DVA in the following.

The DVA’s opinion on veterinary use of telemedicine

The DVA sees many new opportunities in the use of veterinary telemedicine. New platforms can make a positive contribution to improve the quality of telemedicine and veterinarians should take ownership of the opportunities offered by veterinary telemedicine.

Future development of veterinary telemedicine should be made in respect of the veterinary profession, which must constantly ensure animal and human health as well as good animal welfare in a One Health perspective. The veterinary profession has a unique responsibility here, which must be considered in relation to new technical possibilities.

Tele consultation

Based on the current legislation, the DVA suggests that veterinary telemedicine between a veterinarian and a client (patient) can, for example, be used in the following areas where the telemedicine consultation replaces a physical meeting:

- Simple controls such as postoperative wound control
- Management of chronic, precisely diagnosed disorders, where the veterinarian has good knowledge of the patient
- Assessment of clinical effect in owner-initiated treatments of production animals at the individual animal level
- Assessment of production animals regarding the animal fitness before transport or need for acute euthanasia at single animal level.

Tele diagnosis

The diagnosing of animals is reserved for veterinarians by law.

- The DVA does not believe that veterinarians can make a new diagnosis on a patient who has only been consulted and diagnosed via a telemedicine consultation.
- The DVA believes that veterinarians can make a tentative diagnosis based on a teleconsultation and based on this, refer pet owners to veterinary treatment or prescribe an owner-initiated treatment with other than prescription drugs, which serve to minimize the animal's discomfort, pain or suffering with reference to for example the Animal Welfare Act.

Tele prescription

Tele prescription covers the prescription of medication or other treatments to the animal.

- The DVA does not believe that veterinarians can apply, supply, or prescribe prescription medicines for animals without prior physical consultation, cf. the Danish Veterinary Act § 12 *stk. 1*.
- However, it cannot be ruled out that it is possible to use telemedicine for re-prescribing prescription medicines to a certain extent. Here it is important that there is an already existing disorder, which has previously been diagnosed by the specific veterinarian, and the veterinarian has an in-depth knowledge of the patient and the animal owner, cf. current legislation, just as there should be a plan for the next physical consultation.
- In relation to re-prescribing to production animals, it is important that there is no compromise in relation to the use, supply and prescribing of prescription medicines for production animals: E.g., that requirements for herd health visit agreements are maintained.

The responsibility of the veterinarian

- Veterinarians must be aware that it will ultimately be the veterinarian's specific assessment in the specific case, within the applicable legislation, that determines whether the use of

veterinary telemedicine is found to be professionally sound. Currently, the veterinary telemedicine has not been assessed in connection with the legislative work in Denmark.

- It is important that veterinarians keep medical records of the performed telemedicine services and agreements with the pet owner on equal terms with physical consultations – although no prescription drugs are dispensed.

Future use of veterinary telemedicine in Denmark

For veterinarians to be able to navigate within and use veterinary telemedicine as a tool in the future, it is important to the DVA that:

- The DVA seeks experience from countries that carry out pilot studies. If possible, this is used for, in collaboration with Danish Veterinary and Food Administration and possibly other stakeholders, to launch a pilot project that actively involves Danish veterinarians from different sectors (e.g., companion animals, horses and production animals) on a voluntary basis, and which aims to clarify application possibilities and limitations for veterinary telemedicine under Danish conditions.
- On the part of the authorities, and based on experience gained, legal criteria are established for the use and quality assurance of veterinary telemedicine, including liability in connection with any diagnosis and treatment of animals.
- Veterinarians are guaranteed access to guidance from the authorities and that Standard Operating Procedures for the use of veterinary telemedicine (SOP) are defined.
- A chapter is written in the code of ethics regarding the use of veterinary telemedicine
- Ensure a coordinated effort for the use of veterinary telemedicine in terms of the authorities' requirements, IT companies' possibilities for implementation in existing practice systems and veterinarians.

It is the DVA's intention to present these prerequisites to the Danish authorities and actively contribute to all above through constructive cooperation with relevant parties.