



Spring horse vaccination with 5-way vaccine. Photos by Jeremiah Vardiman.

Clear communication essential to accessing antibiotics for ailing animals

In Wyoming, many animal owners operate under an informal, good faith understanding with their veterinarian. However, with recent changes to the regulation and availability of antibiotics, animal owners are advised to establish a formally documented veterinary client-patient relationship (VCPR).

Establishing a VCPR can speed up the process of accessing medication when an animal gets sick, especially if the situation requires an antimicrobial treatment.

New regulations

In June 2023, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) brought the use of many

common veterinary antimicrobial drugs under direct veterinary supervision. This decision reflects growing concerns that unchecked use of drugs that are also important in human medicine may lead to the development of drug-resistant microbial strains. Under the FDA's Guidance for Industry (GFI) #263, antibiotics that used to be available over the counter are now available by prescription only. The full text of GFI #263 is available at <https://bit.ly/GFI-263>.

GFI #263 builds on the FDA's 2017 Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD), which limits general use of antimicrobial-containing animal feeds. In the livestock industry, the impact of this regulation was

primarily felt by the feedlot sector. However, the newly implemented GFI #263 impacts all types and classes of livestock and domesticated animals.

When do these rules apply?

A prescription from a licensed veterinarian is now required to purchase certain antimicrobial drugs, including penicillin, oxytetracyclines (e.g., Liquamycin LA-200, Oxytet), sulfa-based antimicrobials, tylosin (e.g., Tylan), and cephalosporin products, among others. GFI #263 addresses antimicrobials only and does *not* regulate antiparasitics, pro/pre-biotics, supplements, or non-antibiotic topical treatments. To

Defining a VCPR in Wyoming

The Wyoming Board of Veterinary Medicine defines a veterinary client-patient relationship as follows (see <https://bit.ly/wy-vcpr> for the full text).

A veterinarian-client-patient relationship shall be characterized by:

1. The Licensee [veterinarian] assuming the responsibility for making medical judgments regarding the health of the animal and the need for medical treatment.
2. The client has agreed to follow the instructions of the Licensee.
3. The Licensee having sufficient knowledge of the animal to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of its medical condition. This means that the Licensee has recently seen and is personally acquainted with the keeping and care of the animal as a result of an examination or by medically appropriate and timely visits to the location where the animal is kept.
4. Readily available follow-up care in case of adverse reactions or failure of the regimen of therapy.

Proper disposal of expired antibiotics

While it may be tempting to reach for an old bottle at the back of the veterinary medicine cabinet when an animal gets sick, expired antibiotics should never be used to treat livestock or other animals. Always dispose of expired antibiotics through proper channels—do not flush expired drugs into septic systems.

Many Wyoming city police departments participate in medication disposal programs and county departments of public health often host pharmaceutical take-back programs throughout the year. Contact your local authorities for details.

view a complete list of the drugs restricted to prescription use under GFI #263, visit <https://bit.ly/GFI-list>.

Note that purchasing prescription antimicrobials from the veterinarian who is prescribing the drugs is not required. The prescription will allow for purchase at any farm and ranch supply store that carries the product. Questions about the use of a veterinary drug should be referred to the veterinarian providing care.

Veterinary client-patient relationships

Perhaps the most important step animal owners should take in response to the implementation of GFI #263 is to ensure they have a formal veterinary client-patient

relationship in place. A VCPR is a shared understanding between a veterinarian and client regarding the management of an animal such that the vet can ethically diagnose diseases and prescribe medications, the client is involved in the process, and the animal patient receives the highest quality care.

Check with your veterinarian to see if they have a VCPR agreement form you can sign together, or draft your own. Many templates and examples are available via a quick internet search.

Working with a new veterinarian

If working with a new veterinarian, animal owners should expect an

in-person examination of the animal in question before a prescription for antibiotics will be made. In herd or flock health situations, the veterinarian may request a site visit to the animal housing area. In cases where a VCPR already exists, these steps may not be necessary.

Hobbyists, pet owners, and producers who have established a defined working relationship with their local veterinarian are well positioned to access critical antimicrobial drugs and continue to provide excellent health care for their animals.

.....
Micah Most is the UW Extension agriculture and natural resources educator serving Johnson County. He can be reached at mmost@uwyo.edu or (307) 684-7522.