



Model Standards for Veterinary Physical Rehabilitation Practice

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Introduction

This document is intended to serve as a model set of guiding principles for the ideal practice of veterinary physical rehabilitative medicine. This model has been developed by the board of directors of the American Association of Rehabilitation Veterinarians in collaboration with the American Physical Therapy Association Animal Rehabilitation Special Interest Group.

Veterinary rehabilitation and physical medicine is defined as the treatment of physical injury or illness in an animal to decrease pain and restore function. A physical rehabilitation veterinarian treats muscle, tendon, ligament, nerve, bone, and joint injuries and uses physical medicine to restore maximal function and relieve pain, akin to the Physiatrist in human medicine.

The motivation for publication of these model standards is in line with the mission statement of the American Association of Rehabilitation Veterinarians.

Ideal standards of practice for animal rehabilitation facilities

- Patient care in the rehabilitation facility should be under the authority, supervision or approval of a licensed veterinarian certified in rehabilitation therapy.
- Initial examination and diagnosis should be determined by a licensed veterinarian with rehabilitation certification.
- The rehabilitation treatment plan should be formulated and the case managed by a licensed veterinarian with rehabilitation certification, or a combination of this veterinarian in consultation with an appropriately licensed physical therapist certified in animal rehabilitation.
- No technician/assistant (certified or otherwise) shall manage a rehabilitation patient.
- There shall be a formal policy in place to monitor and evaluate patient response to care.
- The practice shall use individualized rehabilitation and therapy plans including fitness plans.

- For patients with concurrent conditions: Clients shall be advised early in the course of care of the opportunity to request a second opinion or referral to a specialist for treatment of these conditions.
- The rehabilitation practice shall regularly update the patient's primary care veterinarian as well as any other veterinarian involved with the patient's current care.
- A summary of the initial rehabilitation evaluation findings should be sent to the referring veterinarian at the earliest opportunity, preferably within 24 hours of the evaluation.
- The patient shall be discharged back to the care of the primary veterinarian once therapy is complete.
- When referring a patient for additional workup, appropriate referral communication (such as letter, email, phone conversation) shall occur and should be properly documented in the patient's record.
- Evaluation for pain shall be part of every patient visit.
- Practice team members shall be trained to recognize pain and work in collaboration with the veterinarian to provide appropriate pain management including physical and pharmaceutical modalities.
- Since medical and emergent issues may arise during treatment, and pain management monitoring needs to be addressed by a veterinarian, having the rehabilitation veterinarian on site is ideal. A plan must be in place to address emergent care medical issues and pain management in the absence of direct (on site) veterinary supervision.
- Practice team members should be trained to identify causes of pain, levels of pain, medications and physical methods used to control pain.
- Pain scores should be documented in the medical record at each visit.
- Pain Management techniques should be used when the presence of pain in a patient is uncertain.
- Clients should be adequately educated to recognize pain in their pet.
- Clients should be adequately educated about the possible effects of any dispensed analgesic, including adverse events.
- Tentative diagnoses and medical plans, or their subsequent revisions shall be communicated to clients at the earliest reasonable opportunity.
- A rehabilitation veterinarian should have current knowledge of veterinary-approved diets, nutraceuticals and supplements as well as knowledge and skills in weight loss and weight-management programs.

- Nutritional assessment and counseling should be part of routine care.
- Recommended continuing education requirements:
 - Each veterinarian should have a minimum of 15 hours continuing education every 2 years specifically in veterinary rehabilitation topics.
 - Each veterinarian should have a minimum of 20 hours per year of documented continuing education in the field of veterinary medicine.
 - Each veterinary technician should have a minimum of 10 hours of documented continuing education in the field of veterinary rehabilitation every 2 years.
 - Each veterinary technician should have a minimum of 10 hours of documented continuing education in the field of veterinary technology every two years.
 - Each physical therapist should have a minimum of 15 hours of documented continuing education in the field of veterinary rehabilitation every 2 years.
 - Each physical therapist should complete continuing education in their own field as recommended by their governing state board.