



**INFORMED
CONSENT**
*and the
spectrum-of-care*

PRACTICING VETERINARY MEDICINE ALONG A SPECTRUM-OF-CARE means tailoring treatment options to meet not only the needs of the patient but the the goals, preferences and financial concerns of the client as well. Some veterinarians worry that offering care options that fall short of “gold standard” medicine (i.e.the most advanced treatments with the best outcomes) might lead to disciplinary action from regulatory boards, this is rarely the case. In fact, as long as key protocols are followed, such as well-documented informed consent, the spectrum-of-care approach not only aligns with regulation requirements but optimizes patient care and client satisfaction as well.

Informed Consent and the Minimum Standard of Care Regulatory boards require veterinarians to practice medicine that is reasonable, humane, and appropriate for the circumstances. As such, their assessment of a case is based on a minimum standard of care that reflects what a competent veterinarian would provide in a similar situation. In addition, the board requires that the client's informed consent was obtained throughout the treatment process. This enables veterinarians to ethically offer multiple paths forward that meet or exceed the minimum standard of care, while respecting the goals and circumstances of the client.

Core Elements of Effective Informed Consent Informed consent is essential to the spectrum-of-care model, and it depends on clear and comprehensive communication between veterinarians and their clients. It is critical that clients fully understand the diagnostic findings, available options, risks and prognosis of each option, as well as their anticipated costs. This dialogue is vital to the informed consent process and should be thoroughly documented and maintained along with the patient's medical records, treatment history and recommended care. It not only protects veterinarians if there's a complaint, but also provides evidence of continuity of care and a humane, client-centered decision-making process.

In short, informed consent is not an optional formality—it is fundamental to practicing veterinary medicine along a spectrum of care. By prioritizing clear communication, respecting client autonomy, and meticulously documenting informed consent, veterinarians can effectively practice within this care framework with the confidence that they are meeting professional standards, ethical obligations and regulatory requirements.■

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