

Veterinary telemedicine a necessary adjunct to conventional veterinary service delivery

A message from the KVA chairman, Dr. Nicholas Muyale

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Since COVID-19 was identified in December 2019, Kenya has implemented control measures to manage the pandemic, such as lockdowns and movement restrictions. These measures have had an impact on animal health, especially on veterinary service delivery. The fear of getting infected with COVID-19 has led to animal keepers, especially pet owners to avoid visiting the veterinary clinics.

According to study conducted by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the impact of COVID-19 on veterinary service delivery include reduced laboratory diagnostic capacity, delayed disease notification, increased risk of disease incursion or spread, decreased importation and distribution of veterinary medicinal products, effect on emergency preparedness, among others.

The World Veterinary Association defines veterinary telemedicine as a "subcategory of veterinary telehealth that involves the use of digital communication technology to undertake remote consultation to improve the clinical health status of the patient." There is an increased demand for implementation of Telehealth services globally. This presents opportunities and challenges for veterinary professionals, clients and patients alike. Veterinary telemedicine can be used in sharing animal health information, expanding access to veterinary care, after-hour care, assessing client compliance and patient progress, palliative care, artificial intelligence-assisted diagnostics, remote patient monitoring, specialty consultations, and education.

The practice of telemedicine can be as simple as receiving a phone call from a client you recently saw in your practice as a means of follow upon a case for determination on re-evaluation. It can be the use of audio/video conferencing with an attempt to obtain visuals of the patient, in addition to the owner's

description of progress (or not), to help make that decision. Telemedicine makes remote monitoring possible, supporting clinical acuity in making decisions and delivering recommendations for the patients' care.

It is evident that veterinary telemedicine is beneficial and a necessity in delivery of veterinary services. In support of this practice, Kenya Veterinary Board developed veterinary telemedicine guidelines. These guidelines are meant to guide the practice of veterinary telemedicine in Kenya. Veterinary practitioners are encouraged to embrace the use of telemedicine in providing veterinary services, as an adjunct to the conventional veterinary service provision. So far, only one telemedicine platform has been registered by the Board. AniVet Hub is a veterinary telemedicine mobile application available on both android and iOS ecosystems. The app enables the practitioners to offer video consultations, perform post-operative checks, offer advise to clients at a reasonable consultation fees. KVB-registered veterinary surgeons have to be registered on the platform in order to offer the veterinary services.

Kenya Veterinary Association strongly encourage her members to take advantage of developing telemedicine platforms or join the existing platforms. Telemedicine is safe, provides additional income, flexible and convenient to the practitioner. It's the duty of every veterinary practitioner to safeguard the welfare of animals by providing timely and appropriate veterinary care. Telemedicine will complement the conventional way veterinary services are offered and the animal owners will be assured of availability of veterinary practitioners 24 hours of the day. Embrace telemedicine to serve better the animal resource industry.

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Chairman.