

**Senate Committee on the Environment & Natural Resources
Hearing on Senate Bill 222
February 13, 2017**

(Opposed)

Dear Chair Dembrow and Committee Members,

The Oregon Veterinary Medical Association has long supported consumer choice with regard to obtaining veterinary prescriptions. And veterinarians across the state have honored a client's request to have the prescription filled outside of the practice. To illustrate this, a few years ago, we conducted a survey on pharmacy related issues, and here is what we learned:

1. 97 percent of practices in Oregon have been meeting the client's wishes on prescriptions. What you might not know is that often times we will match the cost of a drug that our client's find from a standalone pharmacy or from a drug outlet on the internet. If we are unable to match the price, then we will work with our clients to ensure that our patients get the medications they need at a lesser cost.

Of the remaining clinics, another two percent have honored the request but also reserved the discretion to not issue a prescription if the outside pharmacy had previously refilled a prescription without the appropriate authorization by the attending veterinarian. This has happened more than you might imagine.

2. A significant majority of veterinary practices – 94 percent – have been presenting clients with prescriptions to have filled at a pharmacy of their choosing without adding a prescription fee. To place this in a different perspective, there are roughly 500 veterinary clinics in Oregon. According to our survey result, only 30 charge a handling fee for writing prescriptions.

Today, *all* veterinary clinics must honor a client's request with regard to veterinary prescriptions. A little more than three years ago, the Oregon Veterinary Medical Examining, our licensing agency, adopted this rule – even if a practice has had a dispute with a particular pharmacy.



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The OVMEB, however, leaves it up to the individual practice to decide whether or not to assess a fee for handling a prescription. We find this to be appropriate. While the vast majority of veterinary clinics don't charge a fee for writing prescriptions, some businesses believe it is necessary to cover their costs in reviewing and issuing prescriptions. They alone should determine the business policy for their practice.

Now, if I may, I would like to make a general comment about prescription medications we use in veterinary medicine. The health and safety of our patients is foremost in our minds. While some of the prescriptions used in our profession are commonly available on the human side, many are not. In addition, many prescription drugs veterinarians use are unique in the type of medications for the targeted species and in the dosing regimen.

Most "big box" pharmacies are only interested in high-volume medications such as flea and tick products and heartworm prevention drugs and don't stock the majority of veterinary-specific drugs that veterinarians dispense. We also have learned from experience that most pharmacists are unfamiliar with their usage in our patients. So, monitoring usage of these drugs is always a concern for the veterinarian.


I also would like to point out that it is indisputable that Oregonians love animals. At 64%, Oregon ranks 4th nationally with the number of households that have pets. There are approximately 919,000 dogs and 1 million cats.

And yet, over the years, our organization's office has fielded but a handful of phone calls from consumers who have raised concerns about a veterinary clinic not writing a prescription for the client to take elsewhere. And in the convening years since our licensing board adopted the rule that requires us to honor a client's request with regard to prescriptions, only a half dozen or so consumers have complained to the OVMEB that veterinarians were charging a fee for prescription services.

The bottom line, as we see it, is that the marketplace is working. With regard to prescriptions, this benefits the consumer:

- Owners have more choices than ever before in our state's history as to where to bring their animals for veterinary services.
- Owners also have more options about where to purchase medications for their animals. Consider all of the brick-and-mortar pharmacies that regularly advertise to consumers about animal drugs, including prescription medications. This includes chain store outlets such as Costco, Wal-Mart, Walgreen's and Rite-Aid as well as grocery stores with pharmacies – stores such as Fred Meyer and Safeway.

And then you have hundreds of online pharmacies that market their products – again, including prescriptions – to consumers, with the most notable being PetMed Express.

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While we recognize that some individual consumers may have had a poor experience with some veterinary practices regarding prescription options, we believe this is the exception and not the rule. For these reasons, we respectfully ask that you to oppose Senate Bill 222.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheri

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Oregon Veterinary  Medical Association

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