

Our Response to Requests for Prescriptions to be filled by Mail Order or Internet Pharmacies

Recently, we have been approached by clients inquiring about having their pet's prescription filled by a mail order or internet pharmacy in an effort to save money. Most of these pharmacies advertise lower prices and convenience as the primary reasons why you should buy your pet's prescription medication from them. The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) encourages member veterinarians to honor their clients' requests to prescribe rather than dispense a drug when a valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR) exists and the veterinarian has determined that the drug is medically necessary. However, before you have your pet's prescription filled by a mail order or internet pharmacy, you should ask yourself and the pharmacy several questions:

- Are they properly staffed with an actual licensed pharmacist and technicians and are they properly trained and up-to-date in the field of veterinary pharmacy?
- Do they make illegal or unethical therapeutic and/or safety claims?
- Is the pharmacy willing to alter your prescription - increase the number of refills or increase the number of doses without proper authorization?
- Is this a quality pharmacy, licensed in your state and in the state where they are located?
- Is the pharmacy a member of the voluntary pharmacy certification program created by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) called VIPPS (Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites)? Contact the NABP at vipps@nabp.net for more information.
- Do they offer prescription authorization by their "pharmacy staff veterinarian" without involving your regular, attending veterinarian? The AVMA does not believe that a valid VCPR can be created over the telephone or the internet.
- Do they offer to dispense medication despite denial of the prescription by the attending veterinarian?
- Is the pharmacy located offshore or in a foreign country, and thereby not subject to U.S. law enforcement?
- Do they have adequate quality assurance of product safety?
- Can they assure proper storage and shipping of the product?
- Are they adequately informed to check for possible drug interactions?
- Does this pharmacy harass veterinarians for prescription orders or refills?
- Are you really saving that much money after considering shipping and handling costs?
- Is the pharmacy guilty of dispensing:
 - Medications not approved by the FDA?
 - The wrong medication?
 - Prescription medications without a prescription?
 - Improperly packaged products?
 - Improperly labeled products?
 - Illegally imported or foreign products?
 - Products stripped of tracking labels?
 - Generic products illegally substituted?
 - Counterfeit products? Go to www.epa.gov/pesticides/factsheets/petproducts.htm for more information from the EPA on counterfeit products for dogs and cats.

- If the pharmacy offers pharmaceutical compounding:
 - Are the raw materials used to produce the compounded formulation of high quality?
 - What type of quality testing is performed?
 - Is their staff adequately trained?
 - Do they use up-to-date equipment that is properly maintained and calibrated?
 - Does this pharmacy practice illegal drug compounding or “drug piracy?”

- **Ultimately:** is your peace of mind and your pet's health worth the relatively small savings?

If you chose to have your pet's prescriptions filled by an internet or mail order pharmacy you need to realize that you are interrupting the valid veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR). This makes it more difficult to monitor for possible drug interactions or to recommend periodic blood tests (for example, heartworm tests, checking liver and kidney values, and monitoring therapeutic drug levels). By purchasing your pet's prescription products from us, your local veterinarian, you should also realize that our profit = your profit. By spending your money locally through the purchase of products from us allows us to be there when you and your pet need us, to hire and train staff, to purchase and maintain equipment, and to maintain our facility. Our primary goal is service. Their primary goal is profit. Loss of prescription medication income may at some point necessitate raising prices in order for your local veterinary clinic to remain profitable. In the end we hope you will realize that the relatively small amount of money you might save by purchasing your pet's prescription medication through mail order or internet pharmacies is just not worth it.

If you ever have questions regarding any of the above information, please do not hesitate to contact us. Visit us online at www.WhiteBearAnimalHospital.com.

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