



Module 32

The Role of the Veterinarian in Animal Welfare

Student Activities

Questions

1. Veterinarians are involved in promoting good animal welfare practice in their everyday life. Name four ways in which you might promote animal welfare in your clinical practice.

(4 marks)

- Pain management
- Diagnosing, treating and preventing disease
- Ethical decision-making
- Communicating with clients

2. Making ethical decisions is a complex process that is a regular part of a veterinarian's work. Within the six-point ethical framework, which of the following should be done first?

(2 marks)

- a) Choose a course of action
- b) Identify the ethical issues involved
- c) Minimise the impact of the decision
- d) Identify possible courses of action
- e) Establish the interests of affected parties

Answer: d)

3. Medical ethics can provide some applicable ethical frameworks for use within animal welfare. Name three of the guiding principles of medical ethics.

(3 marks)

- Non-maleficence
- Beneficence
- Autonomy
- Justice

4. Vets show varying attitudes to animal welfare caused by a variety of influencing factors. List three of the major factors.

(3 marks)

- Age
- Sex
- Previous experience
- Legislation
- Training, etc.

5. Name two common reasons why owners and vets disagree about the right course of action for an animal.

(2 marks)

- There is no universal consensus on the moral standing of animals
- They may disagree about the animal's economic or inherent value
- They may disagree about the animal's best interests
- The cost of treatment

6. What is the main difference between the veterinary professional association and the veterinary licensing body?

(4 marks)

The licensing body applies the law covering the practice of veterinary medicine. This ensures that only qualified, competent veterinarians can practice. The licensing body therefore protects the public interest by protecting animals and their owners from incompetent veterinarians. All practising veterinarians are obliged to be members of their licensing body.

The professional body represents the interests of those veterinarians who chose to join the organisation. Depending on the values held by the executive of the professional body, the interests that they express may be short-term or long-term, and they may or may not coincide with animals' interests.

7. Name four ways in which the professional body may be involved in promoting animal welfare.

(4 marks)

- Making professional policy
- Influencing legislation
- Ensuring the quality of vets via licensing
- Ensuring the quality of vets via approval of the standard of training at the veterinary schools
- Enforcing the national veterinary law, to ensure practising vets maintain standards

In-class activities

Debate

A Belgian Blue cow requires a Caesarean section in order to deliver her calf. This breed of cow has been genetically selected for 'double-muscling' over the hindquarters to produce more quality meat. As a result, almost all calves require delivery by Caesarean section. Use an appropriate framework to decide whether the vet should perform a Caesarean section on this cow.

Divide students into three groups (suggested time for this activity – 35 minutes). Each group should take on the role of one of the affected parties:

1. One group represents the farmer who wants successful surgery for economic reasons.
2. One group represents the vet who may want the fees for surgery, may feel under pressure to do what the farmer wants, and/or may not agree with this sort of selective breeding.
3. One group represents the cow, who wants her own welfare to be good.

Each group should identify possible courses of action, e.g. perform Caesarean, euthanase cow, allow cow to progress through natural labour as far as possible. Each group should elect one spokesperson and then provide appropriate talking points for that individual. Each spokesperson should then present his/her talking points and a small discussion can be prompted by the lecturer.

After this, the class should all take on the role of the vet and decide whether a Caesarean section should be performed. A useful framework to follow would be to:

- identify the ethical issues involved – should the vet perform surgery?
- establish the legal position – the only legal/professional obligation the vet is under in this case is to 'ensure the welfare' of this cow and to prevent 'unnecessary suffering'.
- choose a course of action – use deontology or utilitarianism or both.
- minimise the impact of the decision, e.g. provide adequate analgesia for surgery, decide to try to dissuade the farmer from using this breed in the future.