



World Veterinary Association Position on the Role of the Veterinarian in Animal Welfare

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It is widely acknowledged that animal welfare science is a dynamic and multi-disciplinary field of endeavour. Its application includes scientific and ethical obligations to the physical and mental wellbeing of animals, and it also has ethical implications in regards to human social and cultural needs.

Background:

Animal welfare is a core mandate of the veterinary community generally and veterinarians individually. This concept is articulated by many veterinary organizations in their Code of Practice, Veterinary Oath or other statements of commitment. Such statements centre on the common theme "a veterinarian should be dedicated to the benefit of society, the conservation of animal resources and the relief of suffering of animals and to promote animal wellbeing".

As scientific knowledge in the field of animal welfare expands and the expectations of society change in regard to animal care, so the commonly accepted definitions of animal welfare have evolved. One of the global examples is the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) definition for animal welfare in their Terrestrial Animal Health Code. This definition concludes that animal welfare is an assessment of how an animal is coping with the conditions within which it lives. Further, an animal is in a good state of welfare if it is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe and able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress.

This definition is reflective of the "Five Welfare Freedoms" that are widely accepted as the foundation of good animal welfare and which are supported by the World Veterinary Association (WVA). The concept of "Freedom Five" is paraphrased as:

- ✓ Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition.
- ✓ Freedom from discomfort.
- ✓ Freedom from pain, injury and disease.
- ✓ Freedom to express normal behaviour.
- ✓ Freedom from fear and distress.

Traditionally, the veterinary community has engaged in providing the means to accomplish good animal welfare. These activities encourage: disease prevention and veterinary medical treatment, provision of appropriate shelter, good management, proper nutrition, humane handling, humane transportation and humane killing.

The Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare, drafted by the World Society for Protection of Animals (WSPA) and supported by the World Veterinary Association (WVA), recognizes the importance of proper animal welfare, not only to the animals but also to people. It is well recognized that good animal care can have far reaching and positive benefits in a number of areas, including human physical and psychological health, social development, poverty and hunger reduction, disaster management and environmental sustainability.

As global understanding and concern for animal welfare continues to change, so must the role of the veterinary community evolve in this regard.

WVA Position:

The WVA holds the position that the veterinary community generally, and veterinarians individually, must maintain our commitment to animal welfare and fulfil our duties as animal advocates and leaders in the field of welfare, while recognizing the concepts of One Health and the multidisciplinary nature of animal welfare science.

Veterinary engagement in animal welfare must encompass a wide range of activities, including, but not limited to:

- Traditional veterinary roles in disease prevention and treatment of sick animals.
- Enhanced understanding of pain and stress mitigation and implementation of good standards in veterinary practice that support better welfare.
- Educating, informing and influencing animal owners, handlers and caretakers in regards to best practices regarding welfare improvement.
- Engagement in scientific endeavours that lead to better understanding of animal welfare and application of this knowledge into practice.
- Educating and informing the public at large about good animal welfare practices.
- Influencing policy makers to further protect and improve animal welfare.
- Engaging in the development of animal welfare policies, legislation and the application of their principles.
- Engaging in animal welfare assessments and oversight in animal production activities.
- Encouraging those Assurance Schemes that promote the best of animal welfare.

The WVA supports the visible integration of animal welfare and animal welfare science into veterinary undergraduate education. Day one competencies of all veterinary graduates should be adequate to allow new veterinarians to engage in the discipline of animal welfare. Furthermore the entire veterinary profession needs to integrate relevant evolutions of animal welfare in its future educational and vocational development.