



Bio Vet Innovator Magazine

Volume 1 (Issue 4) OCTOBER 2024



Popular Article

Importance of Animal Welfare and Ethics in Veterinary Profession

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DOI - <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14060317>

Received: October 31, 2024

Published: October 31, 2024

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Abstract:

The significance of animal welfare and ethics in the veterinary profession lies in the responsibility veterinarians hold to ensure humane treatment, lessen suffering and advance animal health. Nonetheless, there may occasionally be conflicts between the interests of veterinarians, animals and animal owners. In veterinary medicine, ethics encompasses both practical decision-making in challenging circumstances and compassion toward animals. The World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) have established standards that place a strong emphasis on respect, stewardship, and integrity. These help veterinarians resolve disputes between owner preferences, animal welfare, and societal norms. In addition, veterinarians are essential in promoting humane care and educating the public, which helps to shape practices that are compassionate and ethical. Frameworks like One Health and One Welfare emphasize the value of ethical practices that benefits all parties involved by further integrating the connections between animal, human and environmental health. Ultimately, ethical veterinary practices not only enhance the well-being of animals but also foster a more compassionate and sustainable community.

Keywords: Animal welfare, Ethics, One health, Veterinary Profession

Introduction:

Significant animal welfare issues are nevertheless frequently observed in all facets of veterinary practice, despite the fact that most developed countries have expectations for proper animal care. Veterinarians are supposed to be knowledgeable of issues pertaining to the welfare of the animals in their care as well as those outside of it, in addition to maintaining health and treating and preventing diseases in animals (Siegford, J.M. et al., 2010). According to the World Organisation for Animal Welfare (OIE, 2012), "Veterinarians should be the leading advocates for the welfare of all animals". The

knowledge, dedication, intelligence and compassion of veterinary professionals have the ability to significantly improve the wellbeing of animals. Although the conditions of animals and the veterinary professionals vary by nation and region, this is a worldwide opportunity. Notwithstanding their care for animal welfare and desire to change things, veterinarians face difficulties that go beyond their conventional technical or clinical knowledge, which must be complemented by knowledge of veterinary ethics and animal welfare science. As the profession grows its role in animal welfare in all communities, there are still a lot of opportunities for us to realize this potential, which has started to be more and more recognized and developed. This paper discusses the role of veterinarians and ethical challenges faced by them in promoting animal welfare.

The Ethical Obligations of Veterinarians:

Veterinarians have a distinctive ethical responsibility to treat and care for animals in a humane manner. This responsibility stems from the knowledge that animals have inherent value and merit respect, love and compassion despite their inability to speak for themselves. The ethical duty to safeguard animal welfare encompasses more than just avoiding harm; it also entails creating an atmosphere in which animals can flourish without needless suffering. Since veterinarians are trusted with the health and welfare of animals, they frequently have to make difficult choices that affect not just the particular animal but also the interests of society as a whole (*Dürnberger, C., 2020*). Veterinarians can evaluate and handle these difficulties in an organized manner with the help of ethical frameworks, which guarantee that their decisions are based on values that put animal welfare first while also taking the environment and human health into account. Additionally, ethical frameworks protect the veterinary profession from possible conflicts of interest and unethical practices (*Rajsinh V. Mohite., 2024*). As such, veterinarians uphold moral standards that prioritize compassion, equity and honesty in all their dealings with animals and their owners. This ethical framework balances the needs of animals with the expectations of their human caregivers, guiding decisions about diagnosis, treatment, and end-of-life care.

Role in Promoting the Welfare of Animals:

Animal welfare is an essential aspect of the veterinary profession. Various facets of an animal's life, such as its physical and mental health and innate behaviours, are included in the concept of animal welfare. In order to ensure that animals lead healthy and fulfilling lives, veterinarians should promote high standards in preventive medicine, humane handling techniques and animal husbandry. This responsibility extends beyond personal care, impacting more general practices in sectors like entertainment, research, and agriculture. Veterinarians help create a society that respects and values animals by advocating for welfare-conscious laws and practices. They are also essential in teaching farmers, policy makers and pet owners the significance of animal welfare and influencing practices that put the well-being of animals first.

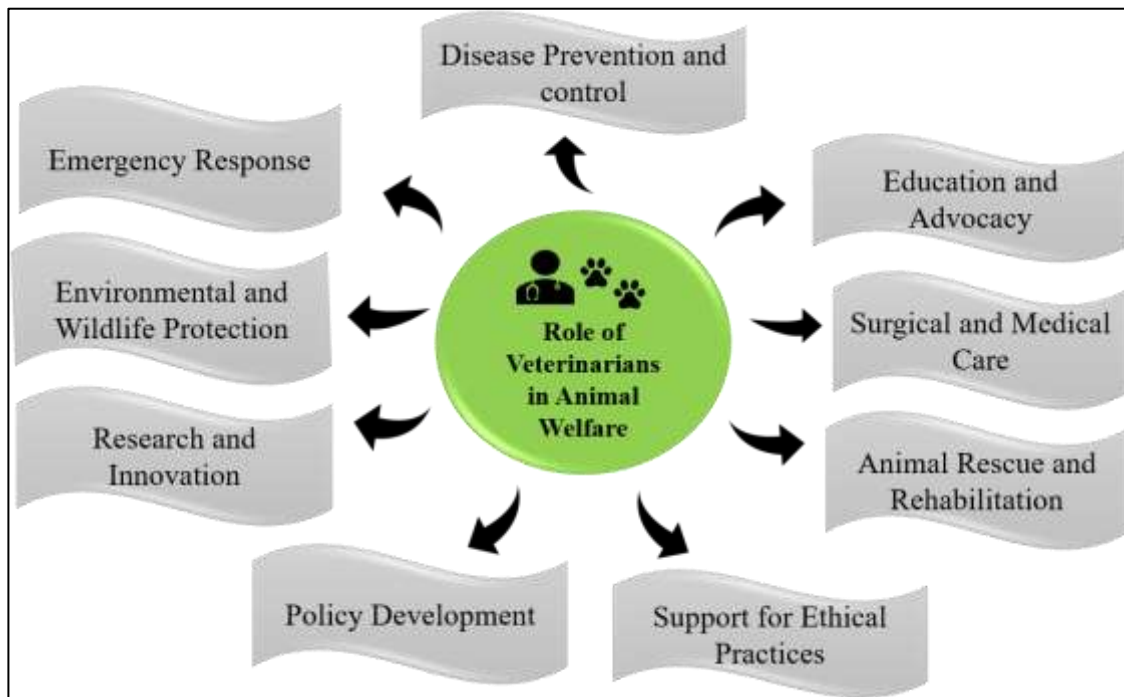


Figure 1. Depiction of the role of veterinarians in animal welfare

Preserving Professional integrity and Trust:

Veterinary oaths and professional codes of conduct emphasize the responsibilities that veterinarians have to their patients, clients, coworkers, the community at large, and more and more, to themselves. Veterinarians are entrusted with the care of animals, making integrity and trust fundamental to their profession. Animal owners depend on veterinarians to deliver accurate information, trustworthy guidance and compassionate treatment. Following ethical guidelines helps veterinarians maintain the public's trust in them, which is necessary for providing quality care and advocacy. The veterinarian-client relationship is strengthened by openness, truthfulness and accountability in diagnosis, treatment choices and results, which furthers the profession's dedication to animal welfare.

Ethical Dilemmas in Veterinary Medicine:

Veterinarians frequently face complex ethical dilemmas, balancing the interests of animals, clients and at times society at large. It is crucial for veterinarians to recognize that moral quandaries can arise from a variety of sources while engaging with staffs and clients. Ethical tension can arise from differing opinions about the value of animals, obligations to animals, evaluations of the interests of animals and interpretations of their professional roles (*Morgan C.A. et al., 2007*). For instance, when addressing matters like euthanasia, veterinarians have to take into account the owner's desires, the animal's quality of life, and moral considerations like suffering and humane treatment. Veterinarians must also negotiate moral dilemmas pertaining to animal welfare, human benefit, and productivity in livestock and research settings. In order to make decisions that are in the best interests of the animals and respect the values of all parties involved, veterinarians must apply professionalism, empathy and ethical reasoning to these quandaries.

Promoting Laws Pertaining to Animal Welfare and Rights:

Veterinarians, being animal advocates, are essential in developing policies and regulations that support humane treatment. The key functions of veterinary authorities, such as surveillance, early detection and control of animal diseases and zoonoses, animal production food safety, and certification of animals and animal products for export, are made possible by veterinary legislation, a crucial component of the national infrastructure (OIE, 2012). Veterinarians can offer their knowledge to policies that shield animals from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by participating in debates about animal rights and welfare legislation. Their participation in animal advocacy promotes awareness and constructive shifts in public perceptions of animals. By collaborating with welfare organizations, taking part in policy-making, and educating the public, veterinarians help ensure that treating animals ethically becomes the standard in society.

The “One Health” Concept:

The One Health and One Welfare frameworks further demonstrates how animal, human, and environmental health are interrelated, urging veterinarians to consider these aspects together to provide sustainable and comprehensive care. Veterinarians play a crucial role in the “One Health” initiative, which is a multidisciplinary team effort that operates locally, nationally and internationally to address pressing issues and achieve the best possible health for humans, domestic and wild animals, and the environment (OIE, 2012). By embracing a One Health approach, veterinarians collaborate with physicians, environmental scientists, public health experts, legislators, and other stakeholders to recognize and resolve complicated health problems that cut beyond conventional disciplinary lines. This involves dealing with zoonotic infections that can be transmitted between animals and humans and have serious effects on public health, like avian influenza, Ebola and rabies. In addition, One Health programs seek to address emerging concerns, such as foodborne diseases, antimicrobial resistance and environmental pollution by encouraging cooperation, data exchange, sector-wide coordinated action (Rajsinh V. Mohite., 2024). Through acknowledging the interdependence of environmental, animal and human health, One Health offers paradigm for advancing health, averting illness, and ensuring the welfare of all living things.

Conclusion:

Animal welfare and ethical responsibility are the cornerstones of the veterinary profession. Veterinarians serve as both healers and guardians of animal welfare, influencing society to treat animals with greater compassion and ethics. By adhering to moral standards and promoting animal welfare, veterinarians improve the lives of animals and provide an environment of integrity, empathy and respect. Developing ethical thinking enables veterinarians to support animal welfare even in difficult situations, which eventually improves health outcomes and complies with public standards for animal

care. This dedication to ethics and animal welfare is crucial to the integrity of the profession and to creating a society in which animals are respected and treated with compassion and dignity.

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