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Dr Tsutomu KUROSAWA (IACLAM)

Avenue de Tervueren 12
1040 Brussels, Belgium

T +32 2 533 70 22
F +32 2 537 28 28
E secretariat@worldvet.org

www.worldvet.org

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

INTRODUCTION

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

Ensuring good animal welfare is a core mandate of individual veterinarians as well as the veterinary community at large. This concept is articulated by many veterinary organisations in their Code of Practice, Veterinary Oath/Declaration or other statements of commitment. Such statements centre on the common theme that a veterinarian should be dedicated to the benefit of society, the conservation of animal resources, the relief of suffering of animals, and promoting animal well-being.

As scientific knowledge in the field of animal welfare expands, and the expectations of society change regarding animal care, the commonly accepted definitions of animal welfare have evolved. A global example of this comes from the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), which defines animal welfare in their Terrestrial Animal Health Code. This definition concludes by indicating that animal welfare can be assessed by examining how animals are coping with their living conditions. Further, animals can be said to be in a positive state of welfare if they are healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe and able to express innate behaviour, and if they are not suffering from unpleasant states, such as pain, fear, boredom, and distress.

This definition is reflective of the "Five Domains", which are widely accepted as the foundation of good animal welfare and which are supported by the World Veterinary Association (WVA)¹. The concept of "Five Domains" includes four physical or functional domains (nutrition, environment, health, and behaviour), which consider biological functioning or physical well-being. The fifth domain (mental state) considers psychological well-being.

Traditionally, the veterinary community has focused on animal health and production as indicators of good animal welfare. Increasingly, it has been recognized that good animal welfare also includes consideration of the animal's affective state (i.e., how the animal feels or sentience) as well as an emphasis on natural living (i.e. consideration of whether the animal can express behaviours that are specific to that species and whether they have what they need and want). It is equally as important to consider and promote positive affective states as well as to prevent negative ones.

The World Veterinary Association recognizes the importance of good animal welfare, not only to the animals but also to people. It is well recognized that good

¹ Mellor D, Beausoleil N, Littlewood K, McLean A, McGreevy P, Jones B, Wilkins C. The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare. *Animals* 2020, 10, 1870; doi: 10.3390/ani10101870

animal welfare can have far-reaching and positive benefits in several areas, including human physical and psychological health, social and cultural development, poverty and hunger reduction, disaster management, and environmental sustainability.

As global understanding and concern for animal welfare continues to change, so must the education and the role of the veterinary community evolve in this regard, including support of the [Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare](#).

WVA POSITION

The World Veterinary Association holds that the veterinary community generally, and veterinarians individually, must maintain their commitment to animal welfare and fulfil their duties as animal advocates and leaders in the field of welfare.

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

- Traditional veterinary roles in disease detection, disease prevention, and treatment of sick animals.
- Enhanced understanding and recognition of pain and its mitigation, and implementation of good veterinary practice standards that support improved animal welfare.
- Educating, informing, and influencing animal owners, handlers, transporters, producers, breeders, researchers, and caregivers in regards to animal care best practices.
- Engagement in scientific endeavours leads to a better understanding of animal welfare and the application of this knowledge in practice.
- Educating and informing the general public about good animal welfare practices.
- influencing policymakers to further protect and improve animal welfare.
- Engaging in the development of animal welfare policies and legislation.
- Engaging in animal welfare assessments and oversight in animal production, research, sheltering, transport, breeding, sporting, educational and recreational activities.
- Encouraging those assurance schemes that promote the best of animal welfare.
- Educating consumers and/or users of animal products and influencing them to demand high-quality products produced under good animal welfare practices.

The WVA supports enhancing the integration of animal welfare science and practice into veterinary professional education. Day One competencies of all veterinary graduates should be adequate to allow new veterinarians to assess and consider animal welfare. Furthermore, the entire veterinary profession needs to integrate relevant advancements in animal welfare into ongoing continuing professional development programmes.