

ANIMAL WELFARE IN THE VETERINARY CURRICULUM

Eric Troncy¹, Mary Klinck¹ and Patricia Turner²

- ¹ Faculty of veterinary medicine, Department of biomedical sciences, Université de Montréal, St.-Hyacinthe, Canada
 - ² Dept of Pathobiology, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph, Guelph, Canada
-

Veterinarians are expected to be leaders in animal welfare but have not achieved this goal because of various conflicts, including the need to balance patient and client needs, the realities of managing financially sustainable veterinary practices, and the need for efficiency in operating national veterinary services. There is increasing societal interest globally in how animals are used by humans and the OIE has, in recent years, emphasized the importance of veterinarians as leading advocates of animal welfare. With this responsibility comes the need for competency in disciplines relevant to animal welfare, which must be adequately addressed in the veterinary curriculum. While the discipline of animal welfare is not absent from veterinary curricula, historically, it has not been emphasized. It is apparent that animal welfare instruction at veterinary colleges is currently insufficient, unsystematic, and disconnected in its delivery. Recent surveys conducted by the FVE in Europe and by the AAVMC and AVMA in North America have indicated great variability in the amount and type of animal welfare content within curricula, which may include instruction on topics such as ethics, legislation, professional responsibilities, behaviour, welfare assessment, recognition and management of pain and distress, and euthanasia. Presentation of information varies significantly as well, with varied delivery methods and timing ranging from basic review of legislation in junior years of the program to more interactive, applied, and integrated approaches used throughout the curriculum. It is increasingly clear that for animal welfare to become firmly ingrained in the minds of young veterinary professionals it must be based on science, presented in an integrated context and in a manner that promotes situational cognition. To address this deficit, model animal welfare curriculum projects have recently been undertaken by the AAVMC and AVMA in North America and the FVE in Europe. The harmonised goal of these projects is to enhance veterinary competency, skills, and leadership in animal welfare. The development by the OIE of recommendations on the minimum competencies required of graduating veterinarians ('Day 1 graduates') in order to contribute to efficient veterinary services (both public and private sector) is welcomed. The OIE's initiatives in the field of veterinary education can provide valuable support to Member countries and, hopefully, a basis for harmonisation of approaches to veterinary education globally.

Keywords: veterinary education – model curriculum – OIE animal welfare standards.