



# **CODE OF ETHICS FOR VETERINARIANS (FEB 2012)**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

**1.1** The Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore (AVA) is empowered to determine conditions for the licence to treat, vaccinate or inoculate animals or birds. One of the conditions of licence is that the licensee shall comply with the Code of Ethics for Veterinarians. The Code sets out appropriate standards for professional conduct to establish and maintain the highest standards of integrity, skill and practice in the profession of veterinary medicine. Some of the rules of conduct are imperatives, cast in the terms, “shall” or “must.” Veterinarians who fail to adhere to these rules may be subject to professional discipline.

## 2 GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

**2.1** The honour and dignity of the veterinary profession lie in the observance of a just and reasonable Code of Ethics set forth as a guide to veterinarians. The purpose of the Code is to assure the community the best service of which veterinarians are capable and to promote co-operation within the ranks of the profession. In addition, exemplary professional conduct not only upholds honour and dignity, but also enlarges our sphere of usefulness, exalts our social standards and promotes the science we cultivate.

**2.2** Fundamentally, there are four (4) guiding principles for the veterinarians:

- i) To pursue the work of his profession with integrity.
- ii) To serve the community to the utmost of his ability.
- iii) To constantly endeavour to ensure the welfare of animals committed to his care.
- iv) To seek no personal advantage at the expense of his professional colleagues.

**2.3** It is not possible to cover the entire field of veterinary medical ethics in this Code. Professional life is too complex to classify one's duties and obligations to his clients, colleagues and fellow citizens into a set of rules. However, it is the solemn duty of all veterinarians to deport themselves in accordance with the spirit of this Code.

## 3 PROFESSIONAL BEHAVIOUR

**3.1** A veterinarian should first consider the welfare of animals, to relieve disease, suffering, or disability while minimising pain or fear. A veterinary surgeon should not engage in unnecessary or unethical procedures that do not serve the purpose of relieving disease, suffering or disability.<sup>1</sup>

**3.2** A veterinarian must not practice without being licensed by the relevant veterinary authority of Singapore.

**3.3** A veterinarian must be familiar with and abide by all relevant legislation and guidelines affecting his professional activity and behaviour.

**3.4** It is unprofessional to aid in illegal practices of others. It is the duty of veterinary surgeons to report practices contrary to relevant legislation and the Code of Ethics, or which compromises the welfare of animals, to the relevant authorities.

**3.5** The issuing of false certificates of health on official documents and careless compliance with official regulations that the veterinarian is entrusted to endorse is deemed a violation of professional honesty.

**3.6** A veterinarian should strive to improve his veterinary knowledge and skills and keep abreast of veterinary developments. He is encouraged to collaborate with other professionals in the quest for knowledge and professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> Refer to Annex A.

**3.7** The responsibilities of the veterinary profession extend beyond individual patients and clients to society in general. Veterinary surgeons are encouraged to make their knowledge available to their communities and to provide their services for activities that protect public health.

**3.8** A veterinarian shall not slander, belittle, or injure the professional standing or reputation of another member of the veterinary profession or unnecessarily condemn the character of another veterinary surgeon's professional acts.

**3.9** A veterinarian shall not solicit clients.

**3.10** A veterinarian shall avoid the impropriety of employing methods to attract public attention or boast of possessing superior knowledge or skill in the treatment or prevention of any disease.

**3.11** A veterinarian should conduct himself in relation to the public, his colleagues and their patients, and the allied professions, so as to merit their full confidence and respect.

**3.12** It is unethical for a veterinarian to guarantee a cure.

#### **4 ALLIANCE WITH UNLICENSED PERSONS**

**4.1** No veterinarian should aid or countenance veterinary practice by an unlicensed person or allow his name or qualifications to be used for such purposes.

a. A veterinarian should not permit any unlicensed employee or colleague to diagnose disease or assist with any medical or surgical treatment except under his direct supervision.

#### **5 SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE AND EQUIPMENT OF VETERINARY TECHNICIANS OR NURSES**

**5.1** A veterinarian must ensure that all persons assisting in the provision of veterinary services to animals in his care have adequate skills, knowledge and available equipment to enable them to perform their duties to the highest possible standards.

#### **6 SPECIALIST CLAIMS**

**6.1** It is unethical for a veterinarian to claim expertise in any veterinary specialty unless he has been awarded specialist certification which is recognized by the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority. Similarly, although a veterinarian may indicate that his practice is wholly or mainly restricted to a particular species, he must ensure that specialist status is not implied where this is not the case.

#### **7 INFLUENCES ON JUDGEMENT**

**7.1** The choice of treatments or animal care should be guided by the welfare of the animal, the commitment of the client to the treatment, and the safety of the public.

**7.2** A veterinarian should not allow his medical judgment to be influenced by agreements with which he stands to profit through alliances with commercial companies, or by referring clients to other providers of services or products.

**7.3** A veterinarian should disclose potential conflicts of interest to his clients.

**7.4** A veterinarian should not employ his professional knowledge and attainments nor dispose of his services under terms and conditions that would interfere with the free exercise of his judgement and skill or tend to cause a deterioration in the quality of veterinary service.

## **8 VETERINARIAN-CLIENT-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP**

**8.1** Both the veterinarian and the client have the right to establish or decline a Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship ('VCPR') and to decide on treatment. The decision to accept or decline treatment and related cost should be based on appropriate and informed discussion of clinical findings, diagnostic techniques, treatment, likely outcome, estimated cost, and reasonable assurance of payment.

**8.2** Once the veterinarian and the client have agreed, and the veterinary surgeon has begun patient care, he may not neglect his patient and must continue to provide professional services related to that injury or illness within the previously agreed parameters.

**8.3** A veterinarian may terminate a VCPR under justifiable conditions, and should always use courtesy and tact in effecting this termination.

**8.3.1** If there is no ongoing medical condition, a veterinarian may terminate a VCPR by notifying the client that he no longer wishes to serve that patient and client.

**8.3.2** If there is an ongoing medical or surgical condition, in the absence of the attending veterinarian the patient should be referred to another veterinarian for care, and treatment.

**8.3.3** If the informed client declines further care or declines to assume responsibility for the fees, the VCPR may be terminated by either party.

**8.4** Clients may terminate the VCPR at any time.

**8.5** Clients should be allowed the option of a second opinion or referral.

## **9 ATTENDING, CONSULTING AND REFERRING**

### **9.1 Attending**

**9.1.1** An attending veterinarian is a veterinarian who assumes responsibility for the primary care of a patient.

**9.1.2** An attending veterinarian is entitled to charge a fee for his professional services.

**9.1.3** When appropriate, attending veterinarians are encouraged to seek assistance in the form of consultations or referrals. A decision to consult or refer is made jointly by the attending veterinarian and the client.

**9.1.4** The attending veterinarian continues to be primarily responsible for the case once the referral veterinarian has discharged the animal back to him.

### **9.2 Consulting**

**9.2.1** A consulting veterinarian is a veterinarian who agrees to advise an attending veterinarian on the care and management of a case. The attending veterinarian continues to be primarily responsible for the case.

**9.2.2** A consulting veterinarian may or may not charge fees for service.

**9.2.3** A consulting veterinarian should communicate his findings and opinions directly to the attending veterinarian.

**9.2.4** If possible, a consulting veterinarian should examine the patient in the presence of the attending veterinarian. Any statement, which the consulting veterinarian may make to a

client, should be made with the knowledge and/or within the presence of the attending veterinarian.

**9.2.5** A consulting veterinarian must be especially careful to avoid discrediting any veterinarian in the eyes of his client.

**9.2.6** If it is deemed necessary for the attending veterinarian to refer the patient to the consulting veterinarian, with the client's consent, a new VCPR is established with the veterinarian to whom the case has been referred.

### **9.3 Referring**

**9.3.1** A referring veterinarian is one who refers a case to another veterinarian. A referral veterinarian is a veterinarian who agrees to provide the requested veterinary services.

**9.3.2** A veterinarian should recognize when a case is outside his area of competence and be prepared to refer it to a colleague whom he is satisfied is competent to carry out the investigations or treatment involved. The referring veterinarian must communicate directly with the referral veterinarian prior to the transfer of the patient, and must make it clear that he is requesting referral. A new VCPR is established.

**9.3.3** The referring veterinarian should provide the referral veterinarian with all the appropriate information pertinent to the case. Where possible, the referral veterinarian should have such information by the time the patient arrives. Any further information which may be requested should be supplied promptly.

**9.3.4** When the referral veterinarian has examined the patient and made definite findings, he should promptly report his findings to the referring veterinarian including a detailed report (preferably written) with advice for the continual care of the patient.

**9.3.5** The referral veterinarian should inform the client that the patient will not be treated for any ailment other than that involved in the referral, except in emergencies or upon consultation with the referring veterinarian.

**9.3.6** Each veterinarian involved will collect his own fee from the client.

**9.3.7** It is unethical for a veterinarian to accept from or pay a fee to another veterinarian for the referral procedure.

## **10 EMERGENCY SERVICE**

**10.1** In emergencies, a veterinarian is obliged to provide essential services for animals when necessary to save life or relieve suffering. Such emergency care may be limited to euthanasia to relieve suffering, or to stabilisation of the patient for transport to another source of animal care.

**10.2** When called in an emergency as a substitute for a fellow veterinarian in his absence, it is the veterinarian's duty to render the necessary service and then turn the patient over to his colleague upon his return.

## **11 THERAPIES**

**11.1** A veterinarian is responsible for choosing the treatment regimens for his patients, based on sound, evidence-based science and practice and/or diagnostic test results. It is the veterinarian's responsibility to inform the client of the expected results and costs, and the related risks of each treatment regimen.

**11.2** Experimental therapies should be approved by all relevant authorities including AVA, to ensure animal health and welfare is not compromised.

**11.3** The use of any novel treatments must reasonably be expected to result in a similar or better outcome than that following conventional treatment. The veterinarian must have sufficient knowledge of the treatment in order to make a professional judgement.

**11.4** It is unethical for a veterinarian to promote, sell, prescribe, dispense, or use any product for which he does not know the ingredients.

**11.5** A veterinarian may prescribe drugs, including Controlled Drugs or prescription diets provided that the veterinarian has attended and examined the animal or animals in question. Animals requiring repeat prescriptions should be re-evaluated at appropriate intervals.

**11.6** A veterinarian may sell non-prescription veterinary products if the veterinarian has discussed the case with the owner and having regard to all known circumstances, is satisfied that the product or products supplied will be used correctly and are well suited for the purpose.

## **12 MEDICAL RECORDS**

**12.1** Veterinary medical records are an integral part of veterinary care. Medical records kept by veterinarians shall be comprehensive, clear, accurate and legible and shall be made at the time of consultation, or shortly afterwards. Medical records shall be of sufficient detail so that any other veterinarian reading the records would be able to assume the management of the case. All clinical details, investigation results, discussion of treatment options, informed consents and treatment by drugs or procedures shall be documented.

**12.2** Medical records are the property of the practice.

**12.3** The information within medical records is considered privileged and confidential. It must not be released without the consent of the owner of the patient, unless required by relevant authorities.

**12.4** A veterinarian is obliged to provide a summarized report of the medical records when requested by the client. A veterinarian is entitled to charge a fee for preparing this report.

**12.5** Without the express permission of the practice owner, it is unethical for a veterinary surgeon to remove, copy, or use the medical records or any part of any record for any purposes other than in relation to the treatment of the animal concerned.

## **13 DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING**

**13.1** A veterinarian uses an imaging technique (e.g. x-ray) to make a diagnosis. The client is paying for that diagnosis, not the image or x-ray exposure itself.

**13.2** Diagnostic imaging such as radiographs and scans are a component of medical records and are the property of the practice.

## **14 EUTHANASIA**

**14.1** Humane euthanasia of animals is an ethical veterinary procedure. A veterinarian must consider the euthanasia of an animal to prevent unnecessary suffering, but prior to this, treatment options must be considered, as appropriate. Informed consent for euthanasia should be obtained in writing as far as possible.

**14.2** A veterinarian is entitled to refuse a request for euthanasia if he does not deem it necessary. A veterinarian whose recommendation of euthanasia is not accepted by the client is entitled to terminate the VCPR.



## **15 VETERINARIANS EMPLOYED BY NON-VETERINARIANS**

**15.1** A veterinarian employed by a non-veterinarian must act according to the Code of Ethics for veterinarians at all times.

## **16 FEES AND REMUNERATION**

**16.1** A veterinarian is entitled to charge fees for his professional services.

**16.2** Discussion of professional fees with the client should cover treatment options and prognoses, and all likely charges (including ancillary or associated charges, such as those for medicines/anaesthetics and likely post-operative care) in each case to ensure that the client is in a position to give informed consent. An estimate of the total fees should be provided to the owner, preferably in writing. The owner should be informed that additional charges may arise during the course of treatment.

**16.3** If during the course of treatment it becomes evident that an estimate or a limit set by the client is likely to be exceeded, the client should be contacted and informed so that consent to the increase may be obtained.

**END**

## **ANNEX A: COSMETIC AND OTHER PROCEDURES**

### **1 GENETIC DEFECTS**

**1.1** Performance of surgical or other procedures for the purpose of concealing genetic defects in all species of animals to be shown, raced, bred, or sold, as breeding animals is unethical. However, should the health or welfare of the individual patient require correction of such genetic defects, it is recommended that the patient be rendered incapable of reproduction.

### **2 EAR CROPPING**

**2.1** Ear cropping is unethical and is not permitted.

### **3 TAIL DOCKING**

**3.1** Tail docking for cosmetic reasons is not to be encouraged. A veterinarian should not perform this procedure unless for medical reasons and in support of the welfare of the animal concerned. If performed, the procedure must be done by a veterinarian under surgical conditions, and not by lay persons.

### **4 DECLAWING OF CATS AND DEBARKING OF DOGS**

**4.1** Declawing of cats and debarking of dogs are unethical unless performed as an alternative to euthanasia. The veterinarian must be satisfied that all reasonable efforts have been made to manage the problem prior to performing the surgery. A veterinarian should first advise his client on the use of all non-surgical alternatives to manage the cat scratching or dog barking behaviour.

### **5 REMOVAL OR REDUCTION OF TEETH FOR CANINE AGGRESSION**

**5.1** The removal or reduction of healthy teeth of dogs as a treatment for canine aggression is unethical. This approach to managing aggression does not address the cause of the behavior and subjects the animal to unnecessary dental procedures which are painful and invasive.

**END**

**ANNEX B: VETERINARY DENTISTRY**

**1** Veterinary dentistry includes:

- i) Cleaning (Scaling and Polishing)
- ii) Adjustment
- iii) Filing
- iv) Extraction
- v) Repair, and
- vi) All other aspects of diagnostic, medical, therapeutic and/or operative oral health care in animals

**2** The practice of veterinary dentistry must only be performed by licensed veterinarians (or veterinary technicians/nurses under direct veterinary supervision) at licensed veterinary centres. The supervising veterinarian shall be responsible for the welfare of the patient and all treatments performed on the patient.

**END**

## **ANNEX C: VETERINARY ADVERTISING**

### **1 STANDARDS REQUIRED OF ADVERTISED INFORMATION**

**1.1** The necessity and right of the individual to bring before the public, notice of the fact that veterinary services are available from the veterinarian at a given place and the scope of these services are recognised. The guiding principle of advertising by a veterinarian is that such advertising shall not be detrimental to his colleagues, nor of such a nature as to lower the status of the profession in the eyes of the public.

**1.2** It shall be the responsibility of every veterinarian or practice owner to ensure that advertising relating to his practice shall comply with this Annex whether such advertising is conducted by him or by another person on his behalf or on behalf of the practice.

**1.3** Where a veterinarian or practice owner becomes aware of any advertising relating to his practice that contravenes the rules in this Annex, it shall be his responsibility to use his best endeavour to procure the rectification or withdrawal of the advertisement and to prevent its recurrence.

**1.4** In general, veterinarians may provide information about their qualifications, areas of practice, practice arrangements and contact details. Such information, where permitted, shall have the following standards:

- i) Factual
- ii) Accurate
- iii) Verifiable
- iv) No extravagant claims
- v) Not misleading
- vi) Not sensational
- vii) Not persuasive
- viii) Not laudatory
- ix) Not comparative
- x) Not disparaging

### **2 OBJECTIONABLE ADVERTISING**

**2.1** Objectionable advertising consists of:

- i) Advertising personal superiority over one's colleagues.
- ii) Advertising secret remedies or exclusive methods.
- iii) Advertising medical case reports.
- iv) Advertising the building or occupation of a new hospital as an unsolicited news item of the local press may be considered unavoidable and unobjectionable. Solicited and repeated publicity of this class is, however, frowned upon.
- v) Distributing printed materials to publicise the services of a veterinarian or veterinary centre.

### **3 MEDIA OF ADVERTISING**

**3.1** Any medium of professional advertising must be equally accessible to any member choosing to use it. A veterinarian may not use a medium where advertising space is sold on the basis that only one of each occupation will be included.

### **4 ELECTRONIC MEDIA**

**4.1** A veterinary practice may maintain a practice website in accordance with the advertising guidelines in the Code of Ethics.

## **5 NEWSPAPERS AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS**

**5.1** An advertisement may be inserted in a newspaper or journal limited to the announcement of the commencement, discontinuance, resumption, removal, sale or purchase of a practice, as the case may be. The wordings of the advertisement shall be limited to the names, degrees and address of the veterinarian, the title of "veterinary surgeon" or any like title to indicate the type of practice conducted, his hours of consultation and telephone number. Any such advertisement shall not appear more than once in any one issue of a newspaper or journal and shall be limited to two issues of the newspaper or journal.

**5.2** Articles on professional subjects may be published in the Press, signed only with the name, title and degree of the veterinarian, provided they contain no advertising matter which would be to the advantage of the author. Articles published by a paper subsequent to an interview with a reporter should as far as possible be governed by the same principles as those set out regarding signed articles.

## **6 PUBLIC LECTURES, TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTS**

**6.1** These should be subject to the same provisions as are laid down for newspaper articles, that is, only the name, degree and titles should be mentioned and no advertising matter included which is to the personal advantage of the speaker.

**6.2** All opinions on veterinary subjects which are communicated to the lay public through any medium, whether it be a public meeting, the press, radio or television should be presented as from the veterinary profession and not as from an individual veterinarian. Such opinions should represent what is generally accepted opinion of the veterinary profession and should be presented as such.

**6.3** Veterinarians taking charge of columns in which answers to correspondences on veterinary questions are printed in newspapers and magazines for the public are apt to cause serious ethical repercussions. Authors should avoid controversial subjects.

## **7 TRADE ADVERTISEMENT**

**7.1** No veterinarian shall promote or advertise any appliance or drug for any proprietor, distributor or vendor for commercial benefit.

## **8 NAME PLATES AND PROFESSIONAL SIGNS**

**8.1** Display signs of reasonable size and dimensions on veterinary clinics or hospitals are not regarded as objectionable, provided they do not announce special services.

**8.2** Display signs should be conservative and in keeping with the surrounding so as to enhance the appearance.

## **9 DIRECTORY LISTINGS**

**9.1** A veterinarian may list his name, degree, title together with the address of his residence or his premises at which he is in daily or periodic attendance in the official telephone directory in ordinary type and setting.

**9.2** In principle, this ruling is intended to make the listing of names in such a way as to give all of them identical visual prominence.

## **10 PROFESSIONAL STATIONERY**

**10.1** The letterhead of a veterinary centre should be modest, announcing only name, title, address, telephone number and office hours. It is recommended that each practice has its own letterhead.

**END**

## **ANNEX D: MISCELLANEOUS**

### **1 HANDLING OF DECEASED PETS**

**1.1** Owners may surrender their deceased pets to veterinarians for appropriate disposal. A veterinarian should honour clients' requests of disposal method where legal and appropriate.

**1.2** It is recognized that animal cadavers can be of use in furthering veterinarians' practical skills and techniques. The use of any surrendered animal bodies for such purposes must be under informed consent of the owner.

### **2 POST-MORTEM EXAMINATION**

**2.1** When a veterinarian encounters a death of an animal under his care, the offer of a post-mortem examination should always be given tactfully. If a post-mortem examination is to be carried out, express permission of the owner should be obtained in writing beforehand. The post-mortem examination should ideally be carried out by an independent veterinarian or specialized pathology service agreed upon by both the attending veterinarian and the client.

### **3 UNCOLLECTED ANIMALS**

**3.1** A veterinarian should make all reasonable effort to locate the owner of an uncollected animal. All efforts to contact the owner should be documented in detail. After a reasonable amount of time has passed, and where the owner cannot be contacted despite all reasonable effort, veterinarians should endeavour to have the animal re-homed. Euthanasia should only be considered if it is in the animal's best welfare due to suffering.

**END**