

Best Teaching Practice on Animal Welfare

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Teaching animal welfare in Veterinary School is a very recent phenomenon, particularly in Latin America. In fact, Animal Welfare started to be part of veterinary curricula in Latin America beginning in approximately 2000, following the global trend of increasing the teaching of animal welfare in veterinary students after 1995. The need for animal welfare courses in veterinary education is clear and was stated in the last OIE Global Conference on Veterinary Education since education (as well as capacity building) is crucial for the global improvement of animal welfare, especially in developing countries, according global organizations such as OIE and FAO.

The core topics that may be included in animal welfare courses have been widely discussed and include animal behaviour, physiology of stress and pain, evaluation of animal welfare, ethics related with the use of non-human animals and notions of common dilemma derived from the use of animals for human benefits including intensive animal farming and biomedical research.

One of the difficulties of teaching animal welfare is the multidisciplinary nature of this subject; therefore a broad group of lectures is needed with expertise on areas as diverse as ethology, physiology, ethics, animal production, economy, to name a few. To promote a proper integration of the knowledge, related courses have to be well coordinated through and evaluation of, the curriculum to ensure incorporation of an animal welfare course while avoiding repetition of topics. In addition, the lectures of related subjects must be aware of the contents and with updated knowledge on topics regarding the ability of animals to suffer. This is probably an area where the knowledge among veterinary professors varies considerable and many may need better education in this area themselves.

Another relevant challenge is to define and assess competencies, including for animal welfare topics. Practical teaching tools should be widely applied, such as field activities, video-analysis, role playing, and preparing essays and ethical debates. Such tools should always have clear guidance and use scientific data to support their use. Finally, animal welfare lectures also should encourage critical thinking regarding the current methods of animal use and decision-making exercises that consider animal welfare implications.

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