Recognising excellence in animal welfare within veterinary education

Co-authors: Nancy Clarke*,1, Kaewta Satayaprasert2, Dr Dan Ventura3, Ruth De Vere1

1 World Animal Protection, Floor 5, 222 Grey’s Inn Road, WC1X 8BH, London, UK. Email: nancy.clarke@worldanimalprotection.org
2 World Animal Protection, 7th Floor, Chaya Spa Plaza, 601 Ratchadaphisek Road, Samannk, Huay Kwang, Bangkok 10310, Thailand

Animal producers, governments, consumers and the public increasingly expect high standards of animal welfare, and veterinary graduates are expected to advise on this in their professional capacity. Furthermore, animal health is a key part of animal welfare, and the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) recommends that all new veterinary graduates must have a good understanding of animal welfare as a Day 1 competency. And that’s where we come in.

Making animal welfare central to veterinary education

For over 15 years, World Animal Protection has worked globally with veterinary educators to provide authoritative and trusted educational and teacher training materials in animal welfare. With the support of the World Veterinary Association, we have been working on an initiative to establish a system recognising good practice in animal welfare across veterinary education globally.

This World Animal Protection initiative aims to:
1. Develop a consensus on the key standards of excellence through which veterinary schools can demonstrate good animal welfare practices.
2. Embed these standards in all veterinary schools.
3. Influence future vets to have a thorough grounding as advocates for animal welfare.

Gaining consensus within the profession

To establish the standards of excellence, World Animal Protection launched a global consultation with the veterinary profession on World Vet Day (26 April 2014) and was open until October 2014. This survey was conducted online and we received 2,614 responses from 97 countries and territories.

The respondent sample was made up of 435 educators, 1,308 students, 323 veterinarians in private practice and 528 individuals working in business, government, NGOs, research and other animal professions. More than half of respondents were female (57%) reflecting the changing gender balance of the profession.

The survey investigated three key topics to help us develop our standards of excellence in veterinary education.

1. The benefits of improving animal welfare education
2. The criteria for welfare standards of excellence
3. How to assess the standards

This survey showed strong support for all ten criteria, with 80% or more of participants expressing a positive response of ‘somewhat agree’ or ‘strongly agree’.

“I wish to express the support of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) for the efforts of World Animal Protection relating to the global survey on suitable standards of excellence in applying animal welfare principles in veterinary education institutions.”

Bernard Vallat, Director General, World Organisation for Animal Health

The World Veterinary Association (WVA) welcomes these findings, which reflect the commitment of the veterinary profession to animal welfare. WVA supports the work of World Animal Protection to promote standards of excellence in animal welfare for veterinary schools.

How to assess the standards

We asked survey respondents to rank three methods of assessment that they agreed or disagreed were a good measure of best practice in animal welfare education. The data showed that professional bodies prefer independent assessment; students preferred peer assessment, and vets in private practice preferred assessment by independent consultants.

Asian vet schools piloting the standards of excellence in animal welfare

Throughout the development of the standards of excellence in animal welfare, World Animal Protection has been working with two Asian veterinary schools to pilot this approach:

1. The College of Veterinary Medicine, University of the Philippines Los Banos, The Philippines

This is the oldest and top performing veterinary school in the Philippines. Now the mission of the vet school is “To provide quality education to veterinary students and professionals in order to support national and global animal health, production and welfare, and safeguard public health.” The use of live animals for educational purposes with alternative models.

2. The Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia

This vet school has successfully developed two animal welfare courses for no less than a cohort of 100 third and fifth year students that will start running in September 2016.

Further information about World Animal Protection’s direct work with these and other veterinary schools and veterinary educators is available on request.

Next steps

A final set of guidelines for the criteria for standards of excellence in animal welfare have now been produced. World Animal Protection proposes that veterinary education community works towards implementation of these standards in order to develop a global holistic and cultural approach to animal welfare training at schools and colleges of veterinary medicine. This will help future veterinarians comply with OIE intergovernmental animal welfare standards.

*For further information contact Dr Nancy Clarke, International Education Manager nancyclarke@worldanimalprotection.org

www.worldanimalprotection.org