



## Code of Professional Conduct

## Introduction

"A profession is a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised area of activity, and who exercise this knowledge and these skills in the interest of others.

It is inherent in the definition of a profession that a code of ethics governs the activities of each profession. Such codes require behaviours and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual.

They define and demand high standards of behaviour in respect to the services provided to the public and in dealing with professional colleagues. Further, these codes are enforced by the profession and its members.

The Australian Veterinary Association Code of Professional Conduct presents and promotes a body of ethical principles to guide veterinarians' conduct in their relationships with patients, clients, colleagues and the wider community of practising veterinarians.

Mankind makes use of animals for companionship, work, food, clothing, teaching, research, recreation and sport. Because of their special knowledge and expertise, veterinarians have a responsibility to maintain and improve the health and welfare of animals, and to constantly raise new ethical issues regarding animals, and may challenge existing ethical perspectives.

## Code of Professional Conduct

The community and your clients are entitled to expect that you will:

- Always consider the health, welfare and respectful treatment of the animal
- Take personal responsibility to uphold the good reputation and integrity of the veterinary profession
- Strive to provide the best possible veterinary services and improve the quality of animal health and welfare at every opportunity
- Foster and maintain good communications and relationships with your clients, earning their trust, and respecting client confidentiality
- Understand and comply with all relevant laws and guidelines, especially those regarding animal welfare, veterinary certification and the prescribing of restricted substances
- Foster and endeavour to strengthen relationships with your professional colleagues, utilising their skills where appropriate
- Maintain and continue to enhance your professional knowledge and skills
- Wherever possible, adhere to AVA policies and guidelines.

## Guiding principles

### 1. *Always consider the health, welfare and respectful treatment of the animal*

1. Veterinarians should recommend appropriate preventive measures and provide suitable management and treatment for disease conditions. Although actions may be influenced by consideration of other factors, veterinarians should not be party to it.
2. Animals should be handled with the minimum of stress and the maximum care. By example, veterinarians should encourage people to handle animals as gently and safely as circumstances allow.
3. Veterinarians should consider the welfare implications of any surgical or other procedure involving animals and act or advise appropriately. Pain management should be used whenever appropriate.
4. Veterinarians should promote humane management of domestic and feral animals. If culling of feral animals or the euthanasia of animals (companion, domestic or feral) is deemed necessary, it should be carried out humanely and a decision is drawn.
5. In an emergency and having regard to legal requirements, veterinarians should provide aid, within the limits of available resources, to sick or injured animals.
6. As members of animal ethics committees, veterinarians should ensure that the highest standards of management, animal handling and analgesia are used at all times, and that the experimental procedures are justified.
7. In the workplace, whenever appropriate, veterinarians should provide guidance to their employers and co-workers on relevant aspects of animal welfare.

### 2. *Take personal responsibility to uphold the good reputation and integrity of the veterinary profession.*

- a. Veterinarians have an obligation to maintain appropriate personal, moral and ethical standards in the practice of their profession, and in other aspects of their personal life. Failure to do so may result in a loss of trust and respect from the public.
- b. In their professional work, veterinarians should make reasonable effort to identify and avoid potential or perceived conflict of interest.
- c. Veterinarians should promote and enhance the integrity of their profession by fostering a sense of trust and mutual respect between colleagues.
- d. Veterinarians working in both private and public sectors should promote positive relationships, to provide a service that reflects credit on the profession.
- e. Veterinarians who become aware of misconduct, or unprofessional or discreditable conduct by a colleague should take such action as seems appropriate in the circumstances.
- f. In any professional capacity veterinarians should exercise their judgment with integrity and with such independence as the nature of their position allows.

### 3. *Strive to provide the best possible veterinary services, and to improve the quality of animal health and welfare.*

- a. Veterinarians have a responsibility to provide the best veterinary services within the prevailing circumstances, and should strive to improve the quality of those services.

- b. Veterinary procedures and recommendations should be based on sound evidence-based science and practice.
- c. Veterinarians should practise within the limits of their knowledge and expertise and, when appropriate, be prepared to recommend referral to a colleague or veterinary specialist.
- d. Veterinarians should provide appropriate continuity of care for their patients or arrange suitable substitute care. To the extent practicable within a locality, provision should be made for an emergency service.
- e. Veterinarians must maintain adequate records as an aide-memoire to facilitate optimal treatment, for communication within multi-practitioner practices, and for legal and statutory purposes.

**4. Foster and maintain good communications and relationships with your clients, earning their trust and respecting professional confidentiality.**

- a. Veterinarians should inform clients of the nature, purpose, benefits, effects and risks, and the anticipated costs of a proposed procedure or treatment. A written estimate should be provided, particularly for major procedures, when appropriate.
- b. Clients should be informed about any available alternative procedures or treatments, in terms they are likely to understand.
- c. Prior informed consent of the owner should be obtained for any procedure or treatment, if readily available.
- d. In discussing options for treatment versus euthanasia with clients, veterinarians should as far as possible, avoid imposing personal value judgements.
- e. Veterinarians will respect their clients' right to confidentiality, and safeguard all information associated with the disease status of an individual animal or group of animals. A careful balance must be struck between the need for confidentiality and the need for communication with other staff within a practice. Unless required by law, information should not be provided to any third party, including a second opinion or referral veterinarian, without the express approval of the client.
- f. When a case is referred to another veterinarian, all relevant information should be provided by the referring veterinarian.
- g. Veterinarians should be cognisant of the special requirements of the particular animal industry in which they practise.

**5. Understand and comply with all relevant laws and guidelines, especially those regarding animal welfare, veterinary certification and the prescribing of restricted substances.**

- a. Veterinarians must be familiar with and abide by all relevant legislation and guidelines affecting their professional activity and behaviour.
- b. Veterinarians must not practise without being registered with the Veterinary Board in their jurisdiction(s).
- c. Veterinarians must comply with all legislative provisions when prescribing, authorising and dispensing drugs, including the requirement for a bona fide veterinarian-client relationship.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d. Veterinarians must not abuse the authority to prescribe or obtain restricted substances or drugs of addiction.

- e. Veterinarians should be familiar with the animal welfare legislation in the jurisdiction(s) in which they practise. They should also take such reasonable steps to acquaint their clients, employees, or other persons with the provisions as may appear to be relevant and applicable at the time.
- f. Veterinarians involved in research or teaching using animals must be familiar with the relevant animal welfare legislation, codes of practice and the role of the animal ethics committee at the institution.
- g. Whilst upholding the principle of confidentiality, veterinarians must do so within the constraints of the law and with regard to their statutory obligations. Although the reporting of a notifiable disease may be required by the law, in the public interest.
- h. If required to divulge information, for example as a witness in court, veterinarians should divulge only that information which is relevant to the case and take care to differentiate factual information from opinion. Information should be confined to areas where the veterinarian has particular expertise and personal experience.

**6. Foster and endeavour to strengthen relationships with your professional colleagues, utilising their skills where appropriate.**

- a. Veterinarians should respect the professional endeavours and integrity of their colleagues and neither exploit particular situations nor use unreasonable actions to gain an advantage.
- b. Veterinarians should offer support to colleagues whenever possible.

**7. Maintain and continue to enhance your professional knowledge and skills.**

- a. Continuing veterinary education and the advancement of knowledge are fundamental to the role of the professional. Failure to keep informed about relevant advances in veterinary science is a dereliction of duty. This may be achieved through journals, interaction with colleagues, publication of papers, and the education and professional development of new graduates, veterinary nurses and veterinary students.

**8. Wherever possible, adhere to AVA policies and guidelines.**

- a. The AVA policies and guidelines cover a diverse range of topics and issues related to various veterinary activities. It is expected that, except in very rare circumstances, AVA members will adhere to these policies and guidelines.
- b. If an AVA member is asked or required to make public comment about a professional matter that is covered by a policy or position statement, and the matter cannot be referred to the AVA President, the veterinarian should refer the matter to the AVA President. In the event that the veterinarian personally disagrees with that position, the veterinarian may state his own position, whilst acknowledging that that view does not accord with the AVA position.

<sup>[1]</sup>Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, 7th Edition 2004. National Health and Medical Research Council.

<sup>[2]</sup>The veterinarian-client relationship is important as the basis for most professional interactions. A bona fide relationship exists where each of the following occurs:

- The veterinarian has assumed responsibility for making judgments regarding the health and welfare of the animal(s) and the need for treatment, with the owner's (client's) agreement.
- The veterinarian has sufficient knowledge of the animal(s) to initiate at least a general or preliminary diagnosis of their medical condition. This means that the veterinarian has recently seen and is personally attending the animal(s) and timely visits to the premises where the animal(s) are kept.
- The veterinarian is available, or has arranged for adequate emergency coverage, for follow-up evaluation in the event of an adverse reaction or failure of the treatment regimen.

