

The HKVA Code of Practice and Guide to Professional Conduct

1. The professional role of the veterinary surgeon in society.
 - 1.1 The professional role of the veterinary surgeon in society.
 - 1.1.1 To prevent and relieve animal suffering
 - 1.1.2 To maintain and enhance the health and well-being of animals
 - 1.1.3 To promote the advancement of veterinary science and the provision of veterinary services for the benefit of animals.
 - 1.2 The guiding principles of professional conduct.
 - 1.2.1 Veterinary surgeons have a special duty towards animal welfare and to alleviate animal suffering. They should be conversant with codes of recommendations and minimum standards for animal welfare measures, laws to protect wildlife and endangered species, laws and measures to prevent cruelty and to prevent disease; and should uphold them and, as far as possible, ensure that others do also.
 - 1.2.2 Veterinary surgeons should treat their clients and the public with respect, consideration and courtesy.
 - 1.2.3 Veterinary surgeons should conduct themselves in a manner that will maintain and enhance the reputation of the profession.
 - 1.2.4 Veterinary surgeons should show respect for colleagues at all times and create an environment in which colleagues can freely exchange information to the benefit of patients and clients.
 - 1.2.5 Veterinary surgeons must be conversant with, and abide by all Laws, Rules and Codes affecting them professionally and, as far as possible, ensure their observance by others.
 - 1.2.6 Veterinary surgeons have a responsibility to be well informed on veterinary matters, to keep abreast of modern knowledge and skills in their sphere or practice, and to ensure that this expert knowledge, experience and judgement is available to the community.

2. Animal welfare

- 2.1 Veterinary surgeons have a special responsibility for animal welfare
- 2.2 Veterinary surgeons must consider the welfare implications of any procedure involving animals and, as appropriate, should act or advise to minimise suffering.
- 2.3 Handling of animals must be carried out with the minimum of stress and the maximum amount of care. By their own example veterinary surgeons should encourage people to handle the animals as gently, quietly and safely as circumstances allow.
- 2.4 Veterinary surgeons should promote considerate management of both wild and domesticated animals.
- 2.5 In an emergency, veterinary surgeons should give aid, within the limits of available resources, to injured or sick animals.
- 2.6 Clinical practice:
 - 2.6.1 Veterinary surgeons in clinical practice have responsibility for recommending appropriate preventative measures and providing suitable management and treatment for disease conditions. The prime consideration when giving advice should be the welfare of the animals under care. Although subsequent actions may be influenced by consideration of the client's commercial, financial, emotional and/or other interests, veterinary surgeons should be careful not to allow nor condone cruelty.
 - 2.6.2 The performance of surgical procedures for purely cosmetic purposes is deprecated.
 - 2.6.3 Veterinary surgeons should use appropriate pain management techniques for animals under their care.
 - 2.6.4 Euthanasia of animals should be carried out humanely. The welfare and interests of the animal should be strongly considered in deciding whether to carry out euthanasia.
 - 2.6.5 Every veterinary practice or other veterinary service must make arrangements for the provision at all times of full and adequate veterinary attention for urgent and emergency cases. If full service is not available, the veterinary surgeon should direct emergency cases to a nearby veterinary practice that provides such service. The veterinary practice must be notified by the referring practice.

3. General ethics

- 3.1 Veterinary surgeons are expected to uphold the dignity and status of their profession under all circumstances.
- 3.2 Veterinary surgeons should recognise an obligation towards the patient at all times, and should practice their profession to the best of their ability for the benefit of the patient. The patient's comfort, welfare and future health must always have priority.
- 3.3 The confidence of the client and diagnostic findings acquired during consultation, or in the course of professional treatment, shall not be divulged to anyone without the client's consent, except where required by law, or where failure to take action would cause cruelty or constitute a menace or danger.
- 3.4 Veterinary surgeons should support fellow veterinary surgeons at all times.
- 3.5 Veterinary surgeons should not give guarantees regarding the results of any treatment, nor exploit for financial gain through inferences or misrepresentations of any sort.
- 3.6 Telephone consultations with unknown persons should be avoided.
- 3.7 Veterinary surgeons' premises should be maintained in a hygienic and professional condition.
- 3.8 Veterinary surgeons who have patients referred to them by another veterinary surgeon should return such patients to the original veterinary surgeon when the specified treatment is completed.
- 3.9 Veterinary surgeons should not knowingly interfere with any on-going treatment instigated by another veterinary surgeon whilst the patient is under that veterinary surgeon's care.
- 3.10 Veterinary surgeons should keep clear and complete records of cases and related matters, including good records of care and treatment carried out. Records should be kept for a minimum of seven (7) years after the client's last visit.
- 3.11 Veterinary surgeons should be familiar with the current laws relating to
 - 3.11.1 the practice of veterinary science in Hong Kong
 - 3.11.2 the care, protection, management and welfare of animals
 - 3.11.3 the prevention of cruelty and of animal diseases
 - 3.11.4 the protection and conservation of wildlife and endangered species
 - 3.11.5 public health

- 3.12 Veterinary surgeons should not use their position nor qualifications for the promotion or enhancement of any product, remedy or commercial enterprise, except as proper and correct in relation to the carrying out of their veterinary and related services.
- 3.13 Advertising shall be in a discreet and professional manner, and all literature shall be printed in a professional style. Any advertising which, in the opinion of the Council of the Hong Kong Veterinary Association (HKVA) shall be withdrawn from use.
Veterinary surgeons should at no time indicate that they are superior in skill/standard to other veterinary surgeons, nor should they tout for business.
- 3.14 Veterinary surgeons shall at all times keep clear records on medicines and poisons in stock, and dispensed dangerous drugs must be kept according to relevant ordinances. Medicines and poisons must not be sold to the public unless part of a treatment resulting from a consultation.
- 3.15 Members of the Hong Kong Veterinary Association Limited shall not work for a private practice which is owned by lay-persons unless that practice is recognised by the Veterinary Surgeons Registration Board (VSRB), for example, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA).
- 3.16 Veterinary surgeons should not give *anonymous* opinions on veterinary matters or animal-related matters to the press, media, their representatives, journalists, reporters, etc. and should not agree to have such opinions quoted or reproduced *anonymously*.
Veterinary surgeons should not use such situations to unreasonably advertise themselves, their practices, their businesses etc.
- 3.17 Veterinary surgeons must at all times extend courteous behavior to colleagues.
Veterinary surgeons should cooperate with colleagues in cases where a client is seeking a referral, or where a client has sought a second opinion independently. This cooperation includes providing information on the patient's history and diagnostics.
- 3.18 Veterinary surgeons should be aware of their own health and well-being and should seek professional assistance for any problem (mental, physical or substance dependency) that could impair their capacity to act in a professional, competent manner.

4. The veterinary surgeon and the patient
 - 4.1 Veterinary surgeons should practice the science and art of veterinary medicine and surgery to the best of their ability and within the limits of their experience to ensure that their patients receive the best possible care.
 - 4.2 Veterinary surgeons must exercise due care and diligence. Every case must be carefully and thoroughly evaluated. Comprehensive, accurate clinical records must be made at the time and maintained for future reference.
 - 4.3 Animal patients should be treated with respect and compassion.
 - 4.4 Veterinary surgeons should ensure that veterinary surgeons and other health professionals who assist in the care of their patients are properly qualified and fully competent to carry out that care.
 - 4.5 Veterinary surgeons should always bear in mind their responsibility for the welfare of the animal. Where death is deemed to be inevitable, or the animal is suffering and curative treatment appears to be futile or is not feasible, death should occur with dignity and comfort.
 - 4.6 Veterinary surgeons who provide a direct veterinary service to the public must make adequate provision at all times for relief of serious pain or suffering in animals, and for further treatment when necessary, either by themselves or professional colleagues. At times this may, of necessity, be confined to emergency treatment and/or referral to another veterinary surgeon. Within the limits of practicality, this principle of relief of pain and suffering applies equally to wild and unowned animals presented to practitioners.
 - 4.7 Diagnostic procedures and/or treatments should only be recommended or initiated if they seem necessary to assist in the care of the patient.

5. The veterinary surgeon and the client
 - 5.1 A client should always be offered the best option available for treatment or surgery, but lesser options may meet the client's needs.
 - 5.2 All reasonable efforts should be made to convey to the owner or agent, the anticipated outcome of an intended treatment or procedure. Alternative treatments and procedures and likely costs and results should be included in the consideration.
 - 5.3 Veterinary surgeons should take reasonable steps to inform clients of the costs they are incurring. Fees charged should be fair and reasonable. Costs estimates and payment should be discussed before undertaking treatment and as a part of the choice between the various options. It is essential that the client is kept informed about changes to both prognoses and costs by regular communication with the attending veterinary surgeon.
 - 5.4 The information contained in clinical records is available to clients on request, or to other veterinary surgeons on referral. Duplicate copies of records, reports radiographs, etc. are available to clients on request at their expense. Veterinary surgeons must consider as confidential any information concerning an animal under their care derived from either the owner, or someone acting on the owner's behalf, or from examination of the animal.
 - 5.5 When a practice is unattended, advice for clients regarding the nearest available veterinary services (with whom arrangements have been made) must be available. Once a veterinary surgeon has undertaken the care of a case it should not be abandoned without good reason and without safeguarding the welfare of the patient.
 - 5.6 Members of the HKVA agree to abide by the Association's disputes resolution and complaints mediation procedures.
 - 5.7 Subject to their obligation to the welfare of the animal and their duty to relieve pain and suffering, veterinary surgeons should respect the wishes and values of the client in a non-judgmental manner when deciding what course of treatment to follow.
 - 5.8 There is an obligation upon all veterinary surgeons to respect the relationship between practitioner and client. A client has the right to choose and, if desired, to change veterinary surgeons.

- 5.9 Competent veterinary surgeons recognise their limitations and recommend that additional opinions and services be obtained when diagnosis or treatment is not within their expertise, or if requested by the client. When recommending a referral, all relevant information should be made available to the referral veterinary surgeon.
- 5.10 Members of the HKVA are committed to continuing to upgrade their knowledge to ensure that clients are consistently offered the best options.
- 5.11 Veterinary surgeons should treat clients with courtesy and compassion. They should refrain from making comments which may needlessly cause anxiety to a client or damage the reputation of a colleague.
- 5.12 When interpreting scientific knowledge for the public, veterinary surgeons should recognise a responsibility to give the generally held opinions of the profession. When presenting any personal opinion which is contrary to the generally held opinion of the profession, they should indicate that this is the case. When acting as a witness, a veterinary surgeon should recognise his responsibility to assist the court in arriving at a just decision.

6. Veterinary surgeons do not countenance, condone nor participate in cruel, inhumane nor degrading procedures on animals. Veterinary surgeons acknowledge the depth of the relationship between clients and their animal companions, both in life and in death.

7. Veterinary surgeons who provide a service to the public for the treatment of animals must always make provision for the relief of pain and suffering of the animals and for their further treatment by professional colleagues or themselves.
 - 7.1 Proper arrangements must be made for emergency services to be provided.
 - 7.2 Cosmetic surgery is unacceptable except when needed for treatment of an injury or illness, and for good reason in the interests of the welfare of the animal.
 - 7.3 Professional premises:
 - 7.3.1 must be of a suitable condition for the provision of veterinary services to proper professional standards
 - 7.3.2 staff should maintain good professional appearance and standard, and be appropriately attired
 - 7.3.3 should be kept clean, tidy and hygienic
 - 7.3.4 each veterinary clinic or centre etc should be independent of any other business
 - 7.3.5 the veterinary clinic or centre etc should preserve as its primary objective, the care and well-being of its patients
 - 7.3.6 nameplates, signs etc should not incorporate nor connect with any advertisement for other products or business activities
 - 7.3.7 all veterinary premises offering services to the public should indicate the name of the practice, opening hours, telephone numbers for routine and emergency contact, and any other relevant information

8. Tendering

8.1 Tendering for the provision of veterinary services or for the employment of veterinary surgeons is inappropriate except:

8.1.1 where the care and/or treatment of animals is not involved

8.1.2 or if the correct level of professional service can be provided

9. Additional services

9.1 Veterinary surgeons may offer and provide other related services such as boarding, grooming, etc and may advertise these in a proper professional manner. Facilities to carry out such services should be separate from areas used for care and treatment of sick animals, surgical cases, medical cases, etc, but may be carried out within the same premises.

10. “Mobile Vets” including “visiting veterinary surgeons”, “visiting vets”, “house-call practices”, “mobile veterinary clinics”.

10.1 Veterinary surgeons providing such services should:-

10.1.1 have arrangements in hand at all times for the provision of emergency and other urgent treatment

10.1.2 communicate these arrangements and other relevant arrangements effectively to their clients and other relevant parties

10.1.3 mobile clinics should not engage in business activities that are detrimental to colleagues. Such activities include touting, inappropriate advertising, locating the mobile clinic within close proximity to an existing practice.

11. Commencement of practice

11.1 A veterinary surgeon who establishes a new practice, clinic, branch, etc should, prior to opening, advise (insofar as it is practicable) all other veterinary surgeons with practices/clinics in the area that he is doing so. He should also provide them with information on the location of his new practice/branch/clinic and contact telephone number(s) as relevant.

12. Lay staff.
 - 12.1 Lay staff should work under the proper, current supervision and direction of a fully qualified veterinary surgeon.
 - 12.2 Lay staff cannot diagnose, pass clinical opinions, prescribe medicines, nor perform surgery.
 - 12.3 Lay staff may, after proper training:-
 - 12.3.1 provide emergency care for the relief and/or prevention of animal suffering, while awaiting the prompt arrival of a veterinary surgeon (who must be called)
 - 12.3.2 carry out animal care and nursing appropriate for properly trained lay staff
 - 12.3.3 carry out appropriate support work including administration, making appointments, telephone answering and so on
 - 12.3.4 assist a veterinary surgeon in his work, in the physical presence of a veterinary surgeon.

13. Retaining or exploiting animals for unpaid fees.
 - 13.1 It is inappropriate and unacceptable for a veterinary surgeon to retain or otherwise use an animal for the purposes of obtaining the payment of debts, unpaid fees, etc.
 - 13.2 Other methods should be used; e.g. legal procedures, legitimate, ethical debt collection agencies, polite persuasion of the client by the veterinary surgeon or his staff, and so on.
 - 13.3 Correct professional standards and attitudes should be maintained in any matters and procedures relating to the payment and/or collection of fees and other monies.

14. Certificates

- 14.1 All certificates and certification issued by veterinary surgeons must be accurate, truthful and correct.
- 14.2 Veterinary surgeons should satisfy themselves as to the truth and accuracy of what they certify.
- 14.3 Each and every certificate should state:
 - 14.3.1 Date and place of inspection/examination
 - 14.3.2 Identification details of the animal(s)
 - 14.3.3 Procedure(s) and inspection(s) carried out
 - 14.3.4 What is being certified
 - 14.3.5 Name, address and telephone number of the veterinary surgeon who examines/inspects the animal(s) and issues the certificate
 - 14.3.6 The owner and/or keeper of the animal(s) at the time of inspection/certification
 - 14.3.7 Other relevant information
- 14.4 A veterinary surgeon should not issue a certificate relating to any animal which he has not personally examined/inspected in relation to matters being certified.
- 14.5 Misleading, inaccurate or untrue certificates must not be issued.
- 14.6 Subject to the above standards, a veterinary surgeon should take reasonable steps to satisfy himself that any certification which he issues will meet the needs of the client and the requirements of those to whom the certificate may be presented (e.g. overseas authorities in the case of animal(s) being exported). If he cannot properly issue a certificate to fully satisfy these matters, he should explain this to the client. A veterinary surgeon should not issue an inadequate certificate without fully explaining this to the client. The client may decline the certificate in such a case.
- 14.7 Blank or incomplete certificates should never be issued nor supplied by a veterinary surgeon.