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Do Veterinarians Support Animal Rights?

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The delivery of veterinary medical care largely is predicated on the needs of the human guardian in most situations, rather than strictly on the needs of the patient. If the client does not want the patient treated, cannot afford it, or wants something done that is not in the patient's best interest, the will of the client usually is fulfilled. The docking of tails, cropping of ears, killing of a healthy animal because he/she no longer is wanted, and the like, are done for the convenience or whim of the "owner," being unnecessary for the health or well-being of the animal. In other words, the interests of the nonhuman animal take a back seat to those of the human animal. I believe this is inherently wrong. Serious ethical and moral dilemmas also are created for some veterinarians when we are asked to attend animals destined to be killed for food, teaching, research, testing of commercial products, or to be used for human amusement.

It has been eloquently argued that nonhuman animals have certain rights, if humans do (1-3). During a recent survey amongst veterinary students (4), the majority of the respondents indicated that research animals have certain rights. If we are to follow through with the concept of animal rights then we veterinarians need to develop a new way of looking at nonhuman animals, one that recognizes that the animals are not here simply for our use. We should be at the forefront in ethical issues surrounding the use of nonhuman animals. We should not indiscriminately allow the rights of our patients to be abrogated because of human interests.

As a result of similar feelings about a rights-based approach to veterinary medicine, Dr. Neil Wolff and I co-founded the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights (AVAR) in 1981. Our organization is a group of veterinarians who address the moral and philosophical aspects of the rights of nonhuman animals. We feel that all animals have independent interests and intrinsic value that are independent of others'. Each animal is an end in herself/himself and is not simply a means to another's end. We do not find it morally acceptable to consider an animal as property. The present Veterinary Oath is considered inappropriate to us since, by its language, it predicates animal care on the basis of its effects on society and not primarily out of concern for the individual animal. It is our contention that, ideally, each animal we treat be considered the benefactor.

Our intention is to try to balance the needs of nonhuman animals with those of human animals, realizing that this is no easy task in this homocentric world.

Some veterinarians suggested we use the term "animal welfare" instead of "animal rights" in our organization's name. We pointed out, however, that by virtue of our training and career motivation, veterinarians already are "animal welfare" oriented, albeit usually for utilitarian reasons. In that light, the name "veterinarians for animal welfare" has about as much significance as a group of physicians calling themselves "physicians for human health." The term **rights**, therefore, was chosen instead of welfare for the title of our organization because it exemplified this different philosophy.

One of the main functions of AVAR is to interject a veterinary perspective into, and provide scientifically sound advice on, the various animal rights issues. We often act as consultants to various animal rights/welfare groups. We testify on important pieces of legislation that would have major impact on nonhuman animals. We travel throughout the country giving seminars on animal issues and on why animal rights is a needed and timely philosophy. We provide support to students, especially veterinary, who object to the destructive use of animals in their educational process. Many of these students feel that the killing of one group of animals in order to "help" another group who essentially is the same is fundamentally immoral. We concur and point out that there are ways of obtaining the same education without destroying animals. All it takes is dedication and a willingness to do so on the part of our educators.

We realize that practical considerations, custom and numerous other factors make application of an animal rights-based philosophy difficult at times. Not every member of AVAR agrees on all aspects of every issue. We do, however, share a common theme of concern for nonhuman animals above and beyond providing standard veterinary care. Whereas we oppose any exploitation that results in harm to nonhuman animals, the following is a list of some of the specific practices to which we are opposed: ear cropping and tail docking of dogs; tail myotomies and tongue myectomies in horses; hot iron branding; hunting, particularly "trophy" and bow and arrow; trapping; the raising of animals for their fur; lethal predator control; glue traps for rodents

and other animals; research using nonhuman animals to study human behavior, drug addiction (such as alcohol, tobacco, cocaine, and others) and trauma (such as gunshot, head injury, and others); the release of pound animals for research, testing or teaching; the killing of animals in our educational programs, particularly at elementary, secondary and undergraduate college levels; factory farming of animals used for food; the use of nonhuman animals in product "safety" testing, particularly where the product is not important for health, where alternatives are available or where the test involves the LD₅₀ or Draize test; any type of animal fighting; rodeos; and dog racing. Ideally the goal of every compassionate person is the abolition of all forms of animal exploitation. Whereas we applaud this idealism, we cannot ignore the present suffering of nonhuman animals by taking an uncompromising stance that would not lead to progress. As painful as it is for some of us, and particularly for the animals, we feel we must be willing to accept small strides when the alternative is no stride at all.

The members of AVAR are comprised largely of veterinarians from the United States. We have many veterinary members from other countries including Scotland, England, Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Mexico. We are a diverse group including private practitioners, government workers and academicians. Veterinary students also comprise the group and are vital by virtue of their contemporary views and values.

In an effort to broaden our input we also have a nonveterinary affiliate status. We value this group of people for the insight they bring to AVAR as well as for their moral support. They have been instrumental in helping to spread the word about AVAR to their own veterinarians.

A bimonthly newsletter is published by AVAR. We have annual meetings which are held in conjunction with the annual conference of the American Veterinary Medical Association. Last year, Professor Tom Regan, author of *The Case for Animal Rights* (1), was our guest speaker and gave a presentation on why the concept of animal rights is critical to progressive veterinary medicine. Our next meeting will be held in July 1986 in Atlanta, Georgia.

continued on page 24

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continued from page 10

If you are interested in contributing to our venture, we invite you to join us. We are in the process of establishing student chapters at veterinary schools in the U.S. and are seeking dedicated students to organize them. Contact either Neil or me for more information:

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References

1. Regan, T: *The Case for Animal Rights*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1984.
2. Rollin, BE: *Animal Rights and Human Mortality*. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1981.
3. Singer, P: *Animal Liberation*. Avon Books, New York, 1975.
4. Ames, ER and Walker, D: 1984 veterinary student animal welfare attitude survey. INTERVET, p. 10, January 1985. [V]

continued from page 8

YES, there are nonpractice positions available in primate laboratory medicine. Responsibilities of the position involve clinical medicine, research service, and management. Postgraduate training is helpful, not essential. For information on residency programs, contact Dr. Henrickson. Salary ranges are approximately \$20,000 to 25,000 starting and \$60,000 to 80,000 for senior administrative positions.

NO, there are not any nonpractice positions suggested by the veterinary computer society (however, there are veterinarians who are in computer sales). Dr. Waldhalm wrote a very eloquent letter in which he said that there are no jobs available for veterinarians to continue doing what has been done. The new veterinarian must make use of ingenuity and imagination in total animal management.

NO, there are not any nonpractice positions available to veterinarians for animal rights. However, whatever you do, Dr. Buyukmihci wrote that it is the veterinarian's responsibility to see that all animals receive adequate medical therapy.

NO, the National Research Council did not say what positions are available for veterinarians within the National Research Council. For general information about the profession, the catalogue *Specialized Veterinary Manpower Needs Through 1990* is available. However, Dr. Ross included addresses of people to write to about federal employment.

The final part of this article will appear in the next issue of INTERVET—Editor. [V]

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*From Laurie -
Good article!*