Ethics and us!

Tools to make sense of veterinary dilemmas

26th -27th September 2025, Eastwood Hall, Nottingham, NG16 3SS

https://www.eastwood-hall.co.uk/hotel-in-nottingham

Please join us as we explore and discuss ethics in the veterinary profession. Our conference will be led by our VPHA Student ambassadors from veterinary schools across the UK.
This year will also mark 65 years of the VPHA – come and help us celebrate!

Friday 26th September:

- Round-table themed discussions led by students (from 4pm)
- Conference dinner (evening)
- Hotel accommodation available

Saturday 27th September: Confirmed speakers (more to be announced)

Presentations   27 /09/2025 start 9.00 NB Flexible timing

Time	Speaker
9.20	Welcome..! Followed by two presentations – Andrew Storrar memorial Lectures: **"Why ethics should matter to vets, and what should we know?"**
9.30-10.15	**"What is the right thing to do?"** *David Morton*
10.15- 11.00	**"Can you learn to do the right thing?"** *Peter Fordyce*
11.00 -11.20	Coffee break
11.20-12.05	**"Time lines for welfare of all animals"** *Sean Wensley* Before birth +Quality of life + End of life
12.05 -12.50	**Can welfare be measured?** *Sarah Wolfensohn* Welfare matrix+ Current Defra AWF topics
12.50-14.00	Lunch
14.00-14.45	**"Current debates concerning performance animals"**, *Madeleine Campbell* Equids and companion animals (horse and greyhound racing, horse dressage and show jumping, shows and with dogs and cats.
14.45 -16.30	**Students feedback from each group ..** followed by Panel discussion Q & A
16.30	**Conference close**

Andrew Storrar Memorial Lectures 'Why ethics should matter to vets, and what should we know?'
David Morton and Peter Fordyce

"What is the right thing to do?" *David Morton MRCVS CBE, Professor Emeritus of Biomedical Science and Ethics at the University of Birmingham*
The RCVS's Code of Professional Conduct is, in essence, a guide to ethical actions for veterinary surgeons as well as details relating to law. It is based on 4 generic ethical principles that centre around: do good, do no harm, respect for autonomy (of clients and animals), and justice (treating people and animals fairly. Just as in human medicine these four principles are often incorporated and used in our interactions with clients, other vets, other humans and animals, the latter having due regard to their abilities and other constraints equivalent to children and less able humans. I will go through these principles as they are applied in veterinary practice and in safeguarding animal welfare, and illustrate them with some analytical ethical frameworks.

"Can you learn to do the right thing?" *Peter Fordyce, University of Cambridge B.Vet.Med, PhD, DWEL, DECAWBM, AFHEA, MRCVS, Associate professor, Dept Veterinary Medicine, University of Cambridge*
Over the last 200 years ethical pressure from society has caused politicians to formulate legislation that places varying degrees of stricture on what humans can do with, and to, animals.
While not having 'carte blanche', many ethical decisions about what happens to veterinary patients are left to the individual veterinary surgeon. Without appropriate training in ethical reasoning, such freedom of action can result in 'moral distress' for the vet, welfare harm for the patient, and opprobrium for the profession should society feels the social contract encompassed in the VSA 1966 is being abused. Mike Radford, an academic lawyer involved in formulating the Animal Welfare Act 2006 (as devolved) said that 'if law is the means to protect animal welfare, ethics and science are the justification" Given the perception of our profession as 'advocates for animals' , understanding ethical principles and frameworks, and being able to use these to argue for good animal welfare within the context of wider societal ethical concerns, should be a core skill for veterinary policy advisors.

"Time lines for welfare of all animals" *Dr Sean Wensley BVSc MSc FRCVS*
Securing a good life and a humane death for animals under human stewardship requires welfare risks to be identified and mitigated throughout the course of an animal's life. Welfare problems can occur as a result of common husbandry practices, during transport, at the time of killing and as a result of other practices such as training. The likelihood of certain welfare problems occurring can be influenced prior to birth; for example, through breeding decisions. Welfare risks linked to different life-stages will be considered in the context of veterinary responsibilities to animal welfare, with examples of how veterinary policies and actions are driving solutions to identified problems.

"Can welfare be measured? – yes! using the Animal Welfare Assessment Grid (AWAG) – a flexible tool for the continuous monitoring of animal welfare" *Sarah Wolfensohn OBE BSc MA VetMB FRSB DipECAWBM FRCVS, Emerita Professor, University of Surrey*
The Animal Welfare Assessment Grid (www.awag.org.uk) was developed for monitoring welfare of animals used in scientific research and has subsequently been developed for use in a range of animal uses. The AWAG software provides simple, on-screen entry of measures of welfare to enable objective, ethical treatment decisions; revealing where welfare is sub-optimal, helping to find the cause, and identify a solution. The system measures four parameters: physical, psychological, environmental and procedural. The parameters were selected to encompass the 'Five Domains' of animal welfare. Factors for each parameter are selected according to species and type of use and scores from 1-10 are defined. The scores are plotted in graphical form and the area of the resulting polygon gives a cumulative welfare assessment score. Over time, scores can be monitored, drawing attention to the temporal component of welfare that is often overlooked, trends can be analysed and anomalies investigated. In addition to the ability to quantify quality of life at a given time-point, the tool provides a visual representation of the animal's welfare state and can be used to drill down to show what has contributed to that state. If necessary, specific interventions can then be undertaken to improve the animal's well-being. This tool has been validated for use in dogs, primates, birds, carnivores, ruminants, macropods, fish and other taxa. It can be used as a general monitoring system to highlight changes in welfare state or to assess welfare at specific life stages or under particular conditions. This presentation will discuss the use of the AWAG and how it is applied and assists with ethical decision making.
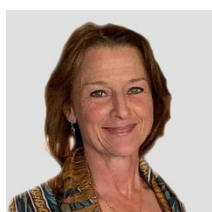
"Current debates concerning performance animals" *Professor Madeleine L H Campbell BVetMed(Hons) MA(Oxon) MA (Keele) PGCertVetEd PhD DipECAR DipECAWBM (AWSEL) FHEA FRCVS EBVS® European Veterinary Specialist and RCVS Specialist in Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law European Diplomate in Equine Reproduction*
The term 'performance animals' is currently being used to describe animals involved in a range of different activities, including but not limited to competitive sport. Public conversation around all human use of non-human animals has become increasingly incoherent. Arguments around 'triviality', although currently popular, are an invalid basis for distinguishing the use of animals in 'performance' from other human uses of non-human animals, all of which (with the exception of the use of non-human animals in medical science) are 'trivial'. What is ethically important is a non-human animal's experience of its own life, and whether their welfare needs can be met. In this presentation, I will explore how the combined application of Campbell's Ethical Framework for the Use of Horses in Sport, Mellor's Five Domains model of animal welfare, behavioural indicators of positive and negative welfare states, and current understanding of the way in which non-human animals learn enables us to distinguish between ethically acceptable uses of non-human animals in competitive sport and ethically unacceptable uses of non-human animals in other activities described as 'performance' (for example, dolphinaria).