

Procedures for a responsible and informed clinical decision

Critical considerations on the "informed consent" in veterinary

The starting point of this volume is the very popular debate in veterinary practice on the so-called "informed consent". The considerations that here emerge however, are based on the premise that such a transposition of concepts from human to animal medicine is quite inopportune: the "informed consent" paradigm for human beings is in fact practically inseparable from its reference to autonomous moral subjects. On the contrary, since veterinary practice deals with non-autonomous moral patients, the reference to consent has a different meaning. In the first place it is generally interpreted as a professional's means in case of judicial contentious : besides this function, the informed consent represents also a form of certified qualification of the performances offered by the vet.

Having rejected the hypothesis of analogy on this point between human medicine and animal medicine , nevertheless the question remains on which is the correct ethical procedure for a veterinary clinical decision. The question is obviously a moral one since these decisions involve the welfare and life of subjects that are considered however in a different way from inanimate objects. The work shows an analysis of the difficulties that veterinary medicine encounters from this point of view in the various fields in which it works. Certainly the circumstances are very different, but they are subject to the same problem : the inconsistency and the incoherence of our moral opinions in regard to the relationships that in many occasions we have with animals. In its research to find lowest common denominators to elaborate a useful and acceptable strategy, the Committee has tried to outline some of the characteristics of the moral status of animals. For this purpose it has considered ethology, ethics, and rights as the three different points of view.

At the end of this approach , a useful key to regulate our relationship with animals has risen in the original notion of welfare. The care for welfare, more than strong notions such as rights, seems in fact to be a linking element between animal and human world.

From these conclusions, which are supported by recent Court sentences and also by a set of rules in force regarding welfare of animals, the book offers a new interpretation of vets' code of conduct. It is indeed the professional code of conduct that should in fact be updated in relation to these common feeling changes : for this purpose, innovations have been proposed in the code of conduct such as care for animal welfare that has to become one of the primary specific duties of vets (as already provided by some rules), including a specific duty for information in relation to the animal welfare.

Just like doctors who, thanks to their specific knowledges and capabilities, are obliged to give assistance in case of emergency, in the same way, since vets are acquainted with the necessary informations regarding animal welfare care, they should therefore have the specific duty to give information about welfare of a particular animal to those who are directly involved in decisions regarding that animal.

In order to obtain this goal, it is necessary that vets establish a correct relationship with the client/owner/carer, so that , having a good information in regard to this matter , it can be possible on both sides to agree in reaching a responsible clinical decision.

Since the Committee thinks it is possible to give an ethical requalification to veterinary profession, it has also thought that it ought to propose practical strategies in order to achieve what has here been said.

In particular it has been considered useful the drafting of specific and particular kinds of forms that can give the relationship a good start.

Another proposal has been suggested in the drafting carried out by single vets of a service card that (besides the technical contents of the services offered) should contain the ethical opinions of the practitioner.

It is thought that such a strategy may help the communication between the vet and the client/owner/carer and hence to further a due process of responsibility when operating with moral subjects such as animals.