

Perceptions of the veterinary profession's role in animal welfare – Summary

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Introduction

Animal welfare is a globally important issue that is receiving increasing scientific, political and public attention (OIE 2005).

In 2002 the OIE (World Organisation for Animal Health) assumed an international animal welfare leadership role. It stresses that it is “vitaly important” that all change must be science based.

The animal welfare science community and the veterinary profession have a shared objective of improving animal welfare globally. Both, via their international organisations – the ISAE (International Society for Applied Ethology) and the WVA (World Veterinary Association) - have confirmed their interest in working closely with the OIE.

These two scientific communities should be working co-operatively and effectively in pursuit of their shared objective. This, however, may not always be the case. The aim of the survey was to examine the working relationship between the two communities.

Method

A questionnaire survey was administered at the 2006 International Congress of the ISAE and the 2006 BVA Congress.

Outcome

A paper has been submitted to the Veterinary Record, to be considered for publication. The paper's abstract is reproduced below. BVA AWF funding is gratefully acknowledged.

Abstract

Animal welfare scientists and veterinary surgeons completed a questionnaire about the veterinary profession's role in the field of animal welfare. A majority from both groups felt that welfare scientists and vets do not have an effective working relationship, or were not sure if they do. Both groups agreed that an effective working relationship was necessary to achieve animal welfare improvements. A majority of welfare scientists (96.1 per cent) and vets (63.0 per cent) felt that most vets do not have a complete understanding of animal welfare, or were not sure if they do. Both groups perceived a need for increased veterinary teaching in animal welfare. Welfare scientists perceived a specific need for this teaching to take a contemporary (i.e. physical and psychological), science-based, view. A majority from both groups felt that vets do not communicate animal welfare research findings and recommendations to animal carers, but there was a high level of agreement that they should. Both groups agreed that vets are uniquely placed to communicate directly to animal keepers and owners, and that their opinion is highly respected by those people.