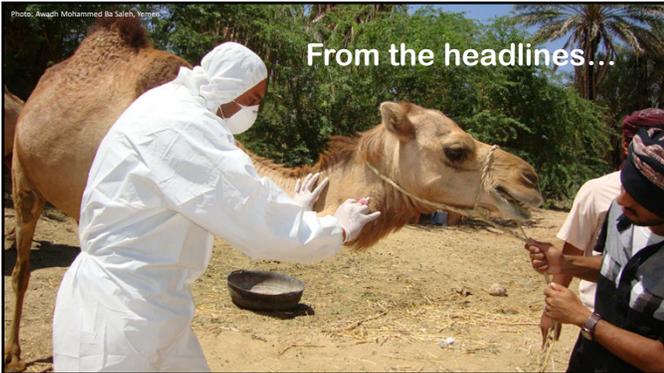




Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the role of ethics in veterinary practice.
- Recognize common ethical issues in veterinary practice.
- Apply an approach to making ethical decisions in your work.
- Understand that ethics often is not about a single “right” answer, but about balancing competing moral and ethical claims.



BBC
The snipers trained to protect rhinos
7 February 2016



In Kenya's Borana nature reserve, drastic new measures are being taken to protect vulnerable rhinos from poachers who kill the animals for their horns.

"We lost 17 from a population of 90," says Borana's Michael Dyer. "We were outgunned and outwitted, so we had to up our game." Dyer recruited a former Special Forces instructor from the British army to train a hand-picked militia of local men, then gave them to right to use lethal force by enrolling them as Kenya police reservists.

The teams monitor 102 rhinos, but when they spot poachers, they don't arrest them. They don't even invite them to lay down their arms. Instead, they kill them - 19 so far, in split-second ambushes during which their victims probably never knew what hit them.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-35503077>

Protecting the Rhinos

- Is this intervention ethical?
- Why or why not?
- What are your assumptions?
- Whose interests are at stake?

What is Meant by "Ethics"?

- Living in accordance with our values.
- The goal of ethical deliberation is not absolute certainty but reliability in our behavior, choices, and character.
Joan Halifax (*Living on the Edge*, 2018)
- The hardest ethical decisions are not about "right" vs. "wrong"—they are about "right" vs. "right," or balancing competing ethical claims
Rushworth Kidder (*How Good People Make Tough Choices*, 1955)

What is Meant by "Professional Ethics"?

- Codes for professionals that guide decisions and conduct
- Veterinarians have ethical obligations to:
 - Patients (animals)
 - Clients (humans who have the animals)
 - The health and safety of the public



Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Veterinary_Outreach_Hawaye_Kebele_Ethiopia.jpg

Dealing with Conflicting Interests



Patients (animals)



Clients (animal owners)



Public health and safety

Have there been times when you felt the needs of these groups were in conflict?

Images:
Cow: <https://www.independent.co.uk/file-style/food-and-drink/cows-beef-farming-reverse-climate-change-global-warming-a202121.html>
Dog farmer: <http://www.sciencenext.com/2016/11/Climate-change-a-good-for-meats-gone/>
Public health: <https://medium.com/the-dsh/you-public-health-gratis-walk-into-a-startup-37a268f50d6>



Scenario:
Example from the
Blue District

Blue District Scenario

Imagine that you are the district veterinarian for Blue District. A local farmer named Isaac has requested permission to move his herd of cattle out of Blue District in order to go to better grazing grounds in the neighboring Green District. Before Isaac's request is approved, you need to certify that you have examined the animals and that the herd is healthy enough to travel.



You travel to Isaac's farm on the western boundary of Blue District. When you arrive, Isaac says that he is very glad to see you today because he plans to move his herd next week, and he needs the certificate as soon as possible. He explains that his cousin is a private veterinarian, and she was able to take blood samples from 20 of Isaac's cows. Isaac shows you the lab results that he says were taken by his cousin, and they indicate that none of the animals tested positive for brucellosis. You know his cousin from past work experiences, and you like her and respect her work. When you ask Isaac if his cousin came to draw blood samples from the cows or if he brought her the blood samples, he hesitates to answer. He finally says that he brought the blood samples to her, but only to save time because he needs to move his herd very soon.

Photo from Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cow_female_black_white.jpg

Blue District Scenario

What would you do?

Let's look at how ethical principles can guide decision-making.



Photo from Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cow_female_black_white.jpg

Four Principles

Will this action provide benefits? [Beneficence] Will this action cause harm? [Nonmaleficence]

Does this action respect the animals, your clients, and the general public? [Autonomy and Respect] Is this action fair to the persons and animals involved? [Justice]

From Beauchamp & Childress (2012). Principles of Biomedical Ethics, 7th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

Other Ethical Frameworks

- The four principles are a common way to approach ethical challenges because they are easy to remember and are relevant for many ethical dilemmas. However, there are other ethical approaches that are not based on the four principles.
- Ethics of Care
 - Taking care of others is a moral action.
 - The ethical course of action depends on the specific context and the relationships involved.
- Ubuntu
 - A term and concept in Bantu languages (Southern Africa).
 - Emphasis on interconnectedness of individuals and the community.

Beneficence: "Doing Good"

- In general, we all agree that it is good to be kind and to do good.
- In some circumstances, doing good for one person (or animal) may harm another.
- In some circumstances, doing good may not be possible.

In the Blue District:

What does it mean to "do good" for the people and animals involved in the Blue District scenario?

What is a way you could do good for Isaac?

For his animals?

For other community members or animals?

Nonmaleficence: "Do No Harm"

- Hippocratic oath
 - "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but I will never use it to injure or wrong them."
 - Oath of Bourgelat (veterinary version) – "First, do no harm."
- Are there situations where in order to achieve a greater good, you have to do harm?
- Harm can be intentional or unintentional.

In the Blue District:

If you make Isaac wait to move the herd until you retest the animals, could this harm him or his animals? How?

If you do not retest the animals, could this harm other animals or people? How?

Autonomy and Respect

- Respect for animal patients, human clients and the general public. Allowing people to pursue their own desires is a form of respect.
- Are there situations in which it is difficult to act with respect for the needs of all involved?

In the Blue District:

You want to respect Isaac's wish to move his herd, but you also have a responsibility to protect animal health and public health.
Which of these responsibilities is more important?

Justice: Fairness to All

- How do you balance fairness to the animal patient, the human client and the public?
- In a situation where the client's well-being and the public's health may be in opposition, we must ask what justice and fairness demand.

In the Blue District:

Is it fair to ask Isaac to wait to move his herd when they have already been tested?
Is it fair to the public to use the herd's test results when you haven't verified them?
What conflicts of interest do you have in this case? If you didn't know Isaac, would your actions be different?

Four Principles

- What do you think about these principles?
- How might you use them in your work?
- Other questions or comments?

Common Ethical Challenges in Veterinary Practice

- Situations characterized by **fear, threat, and mistrust**, such as an infectious disease outbreak
- **Divided loyalties** between patients, clients, and public health and safety (**conflict of interest**)
- **Moral Distress**: when you realize you are causing harm or violating your core principles, but you can't avoid it

Law and Veterinary Ethics

- Does your country have a veterinary association?
- Does the veterinary law in your country have bylaws or regulations related to ethical behavior?
- If you do have these laws, how much are they enforced? What challenges are there with enforcement?
- Are there mechanisms for reporting and discussing ethical issues?





**Ethical Decision-Making in Global Health:
A Proposed Approach**

Let's look at a framework you can use when faced with an ethical dilemma.



Scenario about Conflicts of Interest: Dilemmas for government veterinarians who also conduct private practice

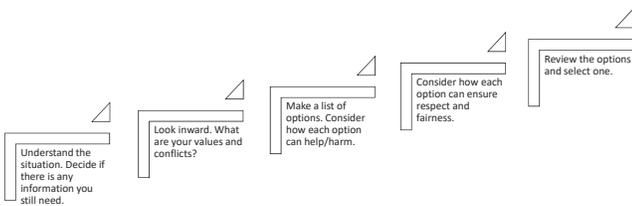
A Scenario about Conflicts of Interest: Dilemmas for government veterinarians who also conduct private practice

You are sub-county Veterinary Officer in District A, in East Africa. You receive an urgent call from a rural pastoralist farmer seeking your help for one of his prize cows, which is high-value (Friesian pedigree). You quickly cancel your meetings for the day and drive to meet him. When you arrive, you find that the cow is recumbent, in advanced stages of pregnancy, with a ruptured amniotic sac, active uterine contractions, and severe vaginal prolapse with indications of dystocia. The animal has been showing signs of discomfort and restlessness for more than 6 hours. There are no other competent veterinary surgeons to handle the case in the area – the nearest being 75 km away.

The situation is an emergency. The government pays your (modest) salary and expects you to be responsible for animal health, but doesn't provide supplies or materials to handle surgical and clinical cases except for special assignments on rare occasions. You happen to have the necessary supplies in your vehicle and are willing to use them in your capacity as a private veterinarian, but you must charge the farmer US \$40 for your time and materials (in part because you need the money to keep your two oldest children enrolled in school), which the farmer considers a lot of money.

Being an experienced Veterinary Officer, you know that African trypanosomiasis, which is a priority reportable zoonotic disease in your country, is associated with uterine or vaginal prolapse. The health regulations of your country require you to report any clinically suspect case of trypanosomiasis to the District Veterinary Officer (DVO), and collect appropriate samples to send to the district veterinary laboratory or a certified private laboratory. The government laboratory services are free. The government lab test results tend to take longer, but they are reliably reported to the national health authorities. In contrast, the certified private laboratory charges for tests; results are obtained much more quickly, but reporting positive results to the government authorities, as required by law, is less reliable. In either case, the farmer must pay the cost of specimen collection.

Ethical Decision-Making in Global Health: A Proposed Approach



In Summary...

- Veterinarians face a variety of ethical challenges in their day-to-day work.
- Professional codes of ethics for veterinarians describe responsibilities to three major stakeholders: patients (animals), clients, and the public.
- The interests – and ethical claims – of these three groups may sometimes be in tension or in conflict with each other.
- Four principles of bioethics can be useful in weighing ethical claims of different groups. These principles are: beneficence; non-maleficence; autonomy (respect); and justice (fairness).
- The 5-step approach to ethical decision-making can help the veterinarian to analyze ethical dilemmas, identify where additional information is needed, and weigh different courses of action.

Acknowledgements

- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations contributors:
 - Caryl Lockhart, FAO Rome
 - Sam Okuthe, FAO Uganda
- Texas A&M University, Institute for Infectious Animal Diseases contributors:
 - David Castellán
 - Heather Simmons
- The Task Force for Global Health contributors:
 - David Addiss, Focus Area for Compassion and Ethics (FACE)
 - Angela Hillmers, Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network (TEPHINET)
 - Jessica Hill, Focus Area for Compassion and Ethics (FACE)
 - Emma Cooke, Emory University School of Medicine
