

Animal Protection and Welfare Courses at the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno, Czech Republic

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Abstract

Animal protection is an issue that takes on ever greater importance in today's society. New expert findings and increasing general public interest are being projected into stricter requirements on the quality of living conditions of animals and their specialist assessment. Such specialist assessment and implementation of desired conditions of animal life requires specialist with university education in animal protection and welfare. It has become apparent that in order to assure adequate knowledge and experience of graduates acting as veterinary inspectors overseeing protection of animals against cruelty it is necessary to gather all the information into a specialized course. The existence of a separate course on the Animal Protection and Welfare in study programmes of veterinary faculties and high quality of instruction are basic prerequisites for improvement in the protection of both farm, companion, wild and laboratory animals in the future.

Keywords: Animal protection; Welfare; Education; Veterinarian; Veterinary inspector

Introduction

Education given to veterinary surgeons has proven to be the optimum professional training from the point of view of understanding individual animals' needs and assessing the extent to which those needs are being met for the purpose of objectively identifying the boundary which, if crossed, man's behaviour to animals can be described as cruelty.

Introduction of animal protection and welfare courses to the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno study programme

The role of official veterinarians in overseeing protection of animals against cruelty underscored the need to assess individual veterinary medicine courses and their content. In order to guarantee that graduates have adequate knowledge and experience to act as veterinarians overseeing protection of animals against cruelty, it became apparent that it was necessary to gather all relevant knowledge into a specialized course where students would be given instruction on welfare requirements of individual species, their fulfilment, supervision over the observance of animal welfare requirements, procedures for investigating non-observance, and penalties. To meet the needs of the veterinary supervision practice, the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno (UPVS) opened a separate course on Animal Protection and Ethology in 1996. Now all undergraduate students of veterinary medicine receive specialized training in a separate one-semester course on Animal Protection and Ethology, thus meeting the requirement of Czech and European legislations [1,2] that an obligatory course with a special emphasis to instruction on the behaviour and protection of animals be included into the veterinary curriculum. Its aim is to produce specialists who will work in state administration as official veterinary surgeons overseeing the observance of veterinary and hygienic conditions and animal welfare requirements in animal rearing facilities, during transport of animals and their slaughter in abattoirs.

Methods of instruction in animal protection courses at the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno

The theoretical part of animal protection training includes lectures on legal regulations governing protection of animals against cruelty that are effective in both the Czech Republic, the European Union and in the Council of Europe. The practical part dealing with animal protection includes training in the assessment of conditions and handling of animals to teach students to objectively identify cruel or abusive behaviours toward animals. The course also includes instruction in procedures used in site inspections for compliance with protection of animals against cruelty, and options in hearing cases of legal regulation violations and in imposing penalties. Instruction covers not only animals kept for farm purposes but also companion animals, wild animals and laboratory animals. In addition to texts, diagrams, drawings and charts, teachers use modern approaches exploiting photos, videos and computer technology. The focus of instruction is on students' competencies that will enable them to independently handle violations of protection of animals against cruelty. To achieve that, students acquire not only the necessary knowledge but they also actively apply that knowledge creatively in practical training. For that reason, practical training requires, among others, that students come up with solutions to a large number of real-life and model situations from practice. This training is greatly motivating for students because

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it models real conditions under which students will operate in practice and students can thus test breadth and depth of their knowledge by exploring their capabilities to correctly resolve model cases from practice. The correctness of the case assessment and resolution in keeping with legal regulations on animal protection is controlled by the rest of class and the teacher. Given the large number of real-life and model situations they are set to resolve, students acquire sound practical skills for their professional career in overseeing protection of animals against cruelty.

Organisation of animal protection courses at UVPS

Animal protection courses at the University of Veterinary and Pharmaceutical Sciences Brno are organized by the Department of Veterinary Public Health for undergraduate students of both veterinary faculties within study programmes in Czech and in English, and as a part of postgraduate study in the study area of Veterinary Public Health and Animal Protection. Academic staff of the Department closely cooperates with the State Veterinary Administration of the Czech Republic, and is therefore in good position to respond promptly to requirements generated by inspection practice and to adjust the content of the course to the need of the role of official veterinarians in overseeing protection of animals against cruelty. They also participate in life-long education of inspectors in animal welfare issues. In their classes, they draw on results of their research into animal protection in which processes adversely affecting usual animal rearing conditions are simulated and effects of such altered conditions on animal health, welfare and yields are monitored. In addition to courses and research, the Department also organizes meetings of specialists and research workers where new findings from the latest studies are presented together with information on relevant legislation, results of inspections and evaluations of ethological and ethical aspects including issues related to the use of animals in teaching. Since 1994, the UVPS has organized annual international specialist conferences on Animal Protection and Welfare regularly attended by workers from state agencies for the protection of animals, universities and other educational institutions,

research institutes, not-for-profit non-governmental organisations as well as by veterinary surgeons and breeders.

Conclusion

High quality of knowledge and experience of the graduates of veterinary faculties in legal regulations and their implementations in the protection of animals against cruelty is a necessary precondition for inspection over animal protection by veterinary surgeons. The existence of a separate course on the protection and welfare of animals in study programmes of veterinary faculties and high quality of instruction are basic prerequisites for improvement in the protection of both farm, companion, wild and laboratory animals in the future.

The aim of the Animal Protection course is to give students a legislative basis for the protection of farm animals, companion animals, laboratory animals, wild animals including animals in zoological gardens and circuses and endangered animal species, the protection of animals at different housing systems, during transport, during trade in animals, at the time of slaughter or killing, during animal experimentation, provision of veterinary care, breeding, game management, fishery, nature and landscape protection. Other courses in the veterinary curriculum build on the knowledge of legislation gained in this course and incorporate the animal protection and welfare issues in specialized topics in areas of animal diseases and their treatment (eg., Diseases of Ruminants, Swine Diseases, Diseases of Horses, Diseases of Small Animals, Dogs and Cats Diseases, Avian Diseases, Diseases of Reptiles and Small Mammals, Game Diseases, Exotic Animals Diseases etc.).

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