Introduction to Ethics in Practice

The module focuses on ethics in relation to Veterinary Practice. It uses scenarios that create the ethical issue of convenience euthanasia to discuss practical ethical thinking. It gives consideration to resolving ethical dilemmas in practice and discusses why ethical debate in the workplace is a positive and necessary thing.

Learning outcomes:

- A understanding of ethical decision making in practice.
- The confidence in making practical ethical decisions.

Course Notes:

Practical Ethical Thinking

- Being prepared before the ethical dilemma arises will be more conducive to a resolution
- Mullan (2006) offers a practical framework for making ethical decisions, and this can be used in practice to resolve individual dilemmas effectively. Here she describes a four point framework, which we will use in relation to the ethical issue of convenience euthanasia of a dog:

1.) Identify all the possible outcomes.
2.) Establish the interests of affected parties, including consideration for legal and professional guidelines
3.) Formulate an ethical decision. There are two steps here: Identifying the ethical issues, and choosing a course of action.
4.) Minimise the decision’s impact.

Some concluding points to consider

- As the research of Yeates and Main (2011) shows, convenience euthanasia is requested in practice often and causes ethical issues for the veterinary practitioners, something Rollin calls ‘Moral Stress’.

- If an ethical dilemma or conflict does arise when a client requests such euthanasia, handling this appropriately may facilitate a positive outcome.

- Communication skills, preparation and teamwork are the tools for positive resolution, and discussing the ethics that surround the issue in a logical and considered manner will be beneficial to all concerned, and help minimise the impact of the dilemma.

- Encouraging ethical dialogue: Ethical dialogue can make a positive move towards change for the better. With ethical thinking comes solutions that can be implemented in practice.
Ethical Scenarios to consider:

1.) When interviewing a nurse for a position within your practice you discover that they are opposed to assisting with pregnant cat spays for religious reasons. What do you do?

2.) A client comes in to book an appointment to euthanise a puppy that they cannot sell. What do you do?

3.) In a new job the practice partner asks you to do something you are sure is not in the patients best interest. What do you do?

4.) A client cannot afford to pay for their cat’s fracture repair, what do you do?

References and Further Reading

- The RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses 2010