Prevention and Protection: Animal Welfare Education in Veterinary Nursing

Abstract

This lecture takes a detailed look at animal welfare and animal welfare education, giving detailed advice on how veterinary nurses can make a positive impact on animal welfare education. It discusses how important animal welfare education is and how to go about implementing strategies in practice to make a positive difference to welfare.

Learning outcomes

This CPD Programme will:
- Explore what is meant by the term animal welfare education (AWE)
- Delineate the role of animal welfare education in veterinary nursing in prevention of animal abuse and protection of animal welfare
- Examine some of the ways human attitudes and beliefs towards animals are formed
- Identify key strategies for AWE in veterinary practice

Course Notes

The concept of animal welfare

- Continuum from negative welfare to positive welfare
- Feelings based: reduction of fear and distress focused on subjective experiencing of animals
- Functioning based: focused on typical behaviour and functioning of the animal usually measured by assessing health, ability to reproduce. Longevity
- Freedoms based: focused on species specific needs

The Five freedoms

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort or lack of shelter
- Freedom from pain, injury and disease
- Freedom from anxiety and distress
- Freedom to express normal behaviour
What is animal welfare education?

- Core activity at the heart of veterinary nursing practice
- Challenges beliefs and behaviours potentially compromising animal welfare
- Involves developing practical strategies to promote animal welfare
- Communicates compassion and care via a relationship-centred approach to practice

Attitudes

Psychologists often conceptualise attitudes as having 3 different components often referred to as the ABC of attitudes:

- **Affective:** this involves emotional reactions to animals and animal welfare issues i.e. how people FEEL about animals or a particular species
- **Behavioural response:** this can be positive or negative towards animal welfare
- **Cognitive (thoughts/thinking):** this entails someone’s beliefs, thoughts and perceptions about animal welfare

Attitudes can be learned through: modelling, classical and operant conditioning

People’s attitudes towards animals

- **Can be reinforced** by parent/caregivers, school, culture, media and peers
- **Pet owners** (companion animal caregivers) will tend to seek out information that is congruent with their beliefs this is known as **confirmatory hypothesis testing**
- Attitudes towards animals are usually formed in childhood, including empathy
“The Links”

- Recent research from the USA and UK have posited links between empathy towards animals and people (Taylor & Signal, 2005)
- Cruelty towards animals has also been linked with violence towards people (Ascione, 2001)
- Empathy is a mediating factor thought to prevent abuse of animals and people
- Need to develop awareness of multi-cultural attitudes towards animals

AWE and the veterinary profession

- Traditionally AWE has not been a part of veterinary education, however The World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA) and the University of Bristol School of Veterinary Science launched the “Concepts in Animal Welfare” syllabus in 2003 aimed at:
  - Developing an understanding of animal welfare relevant to an animal’s physiological and psychological well-being;
  - Recognizing the welfare, ethical, and legal implications of animal use practices and to be able to apply critical analyses from each perspective, for different species, in different situations
  - Stimulating focused critical thinking on welfare issues, which can be developed throughout the course of the individual’s professional career (de Boo & Knight, 2005 p 452)

Animal welfare education and veterinary nursing practice

- Need a basic knowledge and understanding of human attitudes, beliefs and behaviours towards animals
- Attitudes often organise and structure human behaviour and start to form as children with schemata related to animals that are built on over time
- Never make assumptions about clients! Human psychology is complex, sometimes attitudes do not influence behaviour!!
- Avoid prejudices and stereotypes develop your own self-awareness
Prejudices and stereotypes

- **Prejudices** are learned reactions that are unjustified in reality, over generalisations.
- **Modelling** by significant others e.g. parents/carers, teachers, peers are most usually sources of learning prejudice.
- **Stereotype used to describe prejudiced beliefs shown by an individual** e.g. all overweight pets have overweight owners, owners of status dogs are all young males projecting a tough image.
- **Stereotyping** involves creating inflexible schemata.

How can prejudices be avoided?

- By becoming a **reflexive practitioner**
- **Commit to understanding diversity; have a practice policy**
- **Taking time** to think about your own beliefs, behaviours and attitudes; also identify your triggers for prejudice – we all have them!
- **Self-awareness** is vital in working with veterinary clients to change their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours.
- **Education NOT indoctrination!**
- **Working in partnership with clients - a partnership in care**

Factors influencing attitude change towards animals

- Attempts to change attitudes are usually referred to as **persuasion**
- **Credibility** (i.e. yours as a professional vet nurse!) influences success.
- **Likeability** how pleasant and amenable you are; whether the client has an affinity with you; rapport with the client.
- **Power & prestige** e.g. an RSPCA Inspector giving animal welfare advice holds a lot of power because of the legal ramifications of non-compliance; veterinary nurses are also perceived as prestigious.
Practice ethos of animal welfare education

- Decide as a practice team commitment to and strategies for AWE; create a practice policy
- Identify an AWE coordinator and deputy; coordinates wellbeing clinics, orders leaflets, ensures displays in the practice waiting room
- Only consider outreach education talks if someone is confident enough and has time to offer this
- Keep it manageable and real!!

Veterinary nurse AWE initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-acquisition counselling</th>
<th>Puppy parties</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management of potential owners’ expectations of pet ownership</td>
<td>Promoting socialisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lifestyle check/exploring alternatives</td>
<td>Training of puppies</td>
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<td>Involving the family in decision making</td>
<td>Promoting vaccinations and flea prevention</td>
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<td>Rescue animals: challenges and joys</td>
<td>Microchipping</td>
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<td>Avoiding puppy farms; highlighting and discussing welfare concerns of selective breeding</td>
<td>Promoting pet insurance (not any one provider)</td>
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<td>Well-being clinics</td>
<td>Dental health</td>
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<td>Weight management</td>
<td>Information and outreach</td>
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<td>Behaviour clinics</td>
<td>Animal welfare information virtual &amp; in practice leaflets; seasonal animal welfare information e.g. Firework Night, Christmas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Caring for older pets</td>
<td>for displays and website</td>
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<td>Palliative/Continuing Care</td>
<td>School, youth and community animal welfare talks/practice open days</td>
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<td>Arthritis clinics / Dental clinics</td>
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Keep educated!!

Yes stating the obvious!
- Keep your CPD up to date
- Ensure you read professional journals and keep your AWE knowledge current
- Consider further training in communication skills and relationship-centred veterinary practice
- Always consider diversity in planning AWE campaigns and information
- Remember AWE should INFUSE and INFORM every aspect of practice
References


References