



SVME Newsletter

Newsletter of the Society for
Veterinary Medical Ethics

Fall 2016

President's Message

I felt the ground shake when I discovered that Mars Petcare, the animal products/veterinary division of Mars, Inc., had acquired Blue Pearl Veterinary Partners. Blue Pearl Veterinary Partners is a national corporation of excellent veterinary specialty practices. Mars owns Waltham/Royal Canin, Pedigree, Iams/Eukanuba, Sheba, Innova, and California Natural pet foods. And they own Banfield, the pet hospital. Now Mars has become the most important corporate player in the veterinary profession in the United States.

It's a brave new world for the veterinary profession in our country. The profession is changing so fast, in so many ways, that it is starting to become unrecognizable. Veterinary college applicant:seat ratio is currently at 1.5:1, and by 2025 or so, may fall below 1:1. I remember applying to the University of Tennessee when there were 7 applicants per available seat. This means that soon, every single applicant will be able to enter veterinary school. Corporate players are producing "data" to convince businesses to open new veterinary schools at an alarming rate.

It is suggested there is a significant shortage of veterinarians in Appalachia according to one corporate player who stands to financially benefit with the establishment of Lincoln Memorial. The new schools include Lincoln Memorial in Tennessee, 2 schools in Arizona and Utah. News schools are being discussed in South Carolina, Florida, and Texas.

Inside this issue:

<i>President's Message</i>	1-2
<i>Officer Election</i>	3
<i>SVME Meeting</i>	4
<i>SVME Student Essay Contest Winner</i>	5-9
<i>2016 Presidents Address</i>	10-11
<i>SVME Ethics Course</i>	12
<i>Announcements / Upcoming Meetings</i>	13
<i>2016 Shomer Award Winner</i>	13
<i>Membership Application</i>	14
<i>SVME Mission Statement</i>	15
<i>Board of Directors Member List</i>	15



There will come a time in the next decade when schools are competing for a dwindling supply of applicants as more college students become aware of the staggering debt: income ratio they can expect following graduation. This will ultimately lead to the closure of veterinary schools, and I predict it will be the state schools, not the corporate schools.

Compounding this dilemma is the failure of the American Veterinary Medical Association to lead our profession and represent the interests of the membership. The leadership of the AVMA seems either to exist in a separate reality bubble or they are being influenced by outside interests whose agenda is diametrically opposed to the health of our profession and the future of our members. One of my extern students graduated from veterinary school only to have to move into the basement of her parent's home because her veterinary salary could not allow her to pay her student loan. However, Drs. Paul Pion, Greg Bartels and Alice Villalobos have presented seminars at AVMA and CVC advising students to apply for the FDA's 20 year loan forgiveness plan. It accepts 10% of income as monthly payment for 20 years and payment of only the income tax when the loan is forgiven.

I think it is time for the SVME to move forward, forming beneficial relationships with other industry partners. This is the time for us, as individuals, to speak up and let our voices be heard. We need to remind our profession what it actually means to be a professional: that at the core of everything we do as veterinarians, there are ethical principles all of us must consider. Otherwise we are just a trade.

Welcome to the new world!

William Ray Folger DVM, MS, ABVP(Fe)

President of the SVME 2015-2017



Election of New Officers

SVME 2017

Pursuant to Article V of the SVME Constitution and Bylaws, Section 1

“The election of officers will be conducted at the annual meeting and members must be present to vote.”

Because the annual meeting has been moved to the NAVC conference in Jan/Feb of each year, nominations are now being accepted for the following slate of Officers of the SVME:

1. President-Elect whose term will begin July 1, 2017
2. Secretary
3. Treasurer (John Wright has graciously volunteered to continue as Treasurer)
4. Parliamentarian

Nominations may be made by emailing Roni at: svmeinfo@gmail.com

Please earnestly consider being involved in the leadership of the SVME. I believe our profession is at a critical junction, and we are well positioned to offer assistance.

Bill Folger
President
SVME 2015-2017

Special Invitation for SVME Members

SVME Annual Board Meeting & General Meeting

February 4, 2017 Orlando, FL

The SVME Annual Board Meeting will be held in Orlando, FL during the NAVC Conference. The meeting will begin AFTER the sessions are completed.

1pm – 5pm

Hyatt Regency Orlando

Room: Bayhill 19

2017 SVME Lectures:

James Wilson: Pet Ownership

William Folger: Ethics in Social Media

Alice Villalobos: When is It Too Much Surgery:
Preventing Over Treatment at End of Life



SVME Annual Meeting at NAVC 2017

Title: Tiger the Cat, Kristen Lindsey, and the Necessity of Ethical Discourse on Veterinary Internet Forums

Part 1: Tiger the Cat and Kristen Lindsey. This section will answer three questions: was it Tiger in the famous Facebook photo? Was Tiger alive in the facebook photo? And, did the state's expert witness change his testimony, and was the expert biased? Strategic errors by the defense attorney will be examined, and the character assassination of the expert witness on a large veterinary professional forum will be discussed.

Part 2: The Necessity of Ethical Discourse in Veterinary Internet Forums. In this section., definitions of practice ethics and professionalism will be presented. Examples of posting guidelines and active content moderation on professional forums will be examined. The establishment of the culture of hate that exists in many internet forums will be discussed, and practitioners responses to being attacked on the internet by disgruntled clients and previous employees will be shown. How we deal with each other is just as important as how clients respond to us in a social media forum (or anti-social media forum).

***Dr. Erik Clary and Dr. Alice Villalobos presented the first
Ethics Track at the
2016 ACVS Surgical Summit in Seattle***

Topics: End of Life Medical Ethics

Medico-Ethical Decision Making at End of Life, Preventing Over Treatment

When is it too much Surgery?



2016 Student Essay Award Winner

Veterinary Medical Ethics- A Spectrum of Gray

Lisa Uhl

Iowa State University

College of Veterinary Medicine;

Class of 2018

Submitted December 4, 2015 lisauhl@iastate.edu

This case is a great example of how veterinary ethics are implicated in many levels of veterinary medicine. From the formation and revision of federal and state laws, to the daily decisions made by veterinarians in all types of private and public practices every day, ethics play a key role in the outcomes of a variety of situations. The guidelines for the ethics used in this decision-making process are a collaboration of legal, societal, and personal standards that are different for every individual.

The two questions asked in this exercise should be approached separately. "What ethical issues are in play?" is an objective question. One can specifically point out several aspects of the scenario in which an individual's ethics or morals would play a role in his or her opinion regarding how to respond to the situation. However, the answer to the question of, "How should Robin proceed?" is a subjective one. Every individual has an ethical and moral code that is unique. This code determines that individual's decisions.

There are a number of ethical issues in play in the outlined scenario. Each of the following five points will be addressed both individually and together as a whole.

- 1) Lack of legal obligation to report animal abuse
- 2) Lack of protection from lawsuit
- 3) Robin's obligation to her new employer
- 4) Dr. V's obligation to family members vs. obligation to family's dog
- 5) Defining animal abuse

Firstly, legally, Robin is not bound by law to report the suspected abuse to the authorities. This places the decision-making purely in the hands of Robin, and forces her to use objectivity despite



a situation full of gray areas. It places more emphasis on the opinions of her colleagues, which in this situation, may pressure her to not report the incident. However, it also gives Robin freedom to exercise her own judgement in the manner and proceed how she feels is most appropriate in this specific situation. Involving the authorities can be a very useful and necessary measure, but the definition of, “animal abuse,” varies widely. In this example, all we are told is that Robin suspects abuse. Depending on the severity of the situation, Robin could perhaps address the issue with the client through education and communication, and therefore not only increase the quality of life of the dog, but also improve the relationship of the veterinarian and client, if accomplished with tact and respect.

Robin’s lack of protection from lawsuit is an issue that is tied very closely with her lack of legal obligation to report the abuse. If a state government is going to legally require veterinarians to report animal abuse, protection must be provided to ensure compliance by the practitioners. Incidents of animal abuse are not black and white; they are a spectrum of gray. One way to describe the different types of companion animal abuse is to divide it into 2 different categories, physical and mental, each of which includes active maltreatment and passive neglect or ignorance. Physical abuse can also encompass commercial exploitation (fighting, experimentation, etc.)¹. The forms and severities of abuse are wide in variety and, thus, rarely can a veterinarian be completely certain that abuse is occurring. The reputational and financial damage that a lawsuit would cause may ruin a veterinarian’s practice and severely disrupt his or her career. In short, the benefit of reporting a possibly true case may not exceed the cost of reporting a possibly false case when factored into the individual ethical equation of some practitioners, therefore, making the legal obligation to report less effective.

As a new graduate, Robin is just beginning the full development of her moral and ethical compass as a veterinarian. Undoubtedly, she has had many influences throughout her life that have contributed to what she believes to be “wrong” or “right” in a situation. Some of these factors include where she grew up, what school she attended, and her family, friends, instructors, mentors, and employers. Dr. V is both her employer and colleague, and may be a mentor, and therefore may, understandably, have a strong influence on Robin’s treatment decisions. However, when Robin took the Veterinarian’s Oath, she swore that her first obligation as a veterinarian was to her patient.

The Oath reads, “Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society, through the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering, the conservation of animal resources, the promotion of public health, and the advancement of medical knowledge. I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics. I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.”²



The American Veterinary Medical Association also outlines in its Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics under section II.A that, “veterinarians should first consider the needs of the patient: to relieve disease, suffering, or disability while minimizing pain or fear.”³ This means that before all else, Robin must put the dog as the number one stakeholder. She has been trained and entrusted to be the voice for her patient.

Dr. V has a long standing veterinarian/client/patient relationship with this family. This creates trust and can foster a very healthy and long-lasting partnership that successfully matches the needs of a client and their pet to the care provided to them. Unfortunately, it can make difficult conversations, such as the scenario presented, even more challenging to discuss. Fears⁴ of offending the client or losing his or her business are valid. However, as stated previously, while working as a professional, Dr. V is first a veterinarian, and secondly a friend to the family. She must place the family’s dog’s health and well-being as first priority. It is her duty, especially as the practice owner, to at least examine the patient and discuss the situation brought to her attention by Robin.

The last ethical issue that will be discussed is the definition of, “animal abuse.” There are many different terms used to describe the mistreatment of animals. Two of the most commonly used words are, “abuse,” and, “neglect.” However, these words are defined differently in different contexts. For example, in the state of Iowa code of law, “animal abuse,” refers to any type of mistreatment of an animal that is not owned by the abuser, and, “animal neglect,” refers to any type of mistreatment of an animal owned by the neglecter⁴. This brings to attention the carefulness with which veterinarians and lawmakers must use in their vocabulary. It also showcases the vague nature of what we can interpret from the above scenario. All that is known is that Robin, “strongly suspects animal abuse.” It is not known what type of abuse she suspects (intentional vs. unintentional, physical vs. mental) or the severity of the abuse. This is important to note because it may greatly affect the course of action she decides to take in moving forward with the matter.

When looking at all five described ethical issues in one large context, it is easy to see how veterinary ethics is a field with a wide variety of personal opinions and sometimes conflicting standards. An individual is influenced by law, reputation, employers, family, friends, and his or her own personal moral and ethical guidelines. The spectrum of influences and information must be sorted, weighed, and compiled. Only after careful contemplation can the right decision be made, and what is “right” for one individual may not be “right” for another.⁵ Executing the decision may not be easy, but each practitioner should have a decision-making process that is repeatable, reliable, consistent, and sound with the personal ethics and morals of that individual. When faced with a challenging ethical decision, a veterinarian must take the spectrum of gray and filter it into one clear shade.



The answer to the question, “How Should Robin Proceed?” is subjective. However, if one takes into account the above ethical issues, especially the references to the Veterinarian’s Oath and the AVMA’s Code of Veterinary Medical Ethics, it is apparent that some sort of action must be taken to help prevent this animal from any further pain or suffering. However, the way in which Robin proceeds is particularly dependent on the nature and type of animal abuse she suspects. In this scenario, Dr. V tells Robin that the family has, “fallen on hard times after the passing of their bread-winner.” This can lead one to assume that the abuse Robin is witnessing is likely poor body condition due to lack of family funds.

If this is the case, the first step would be to discuss Robin’s concerns with Dr. V, and ideally have her examine the dog and discuss the situation with Robin and the client. Dr. V has a long standing relationship with these clients, and therefore her opinion is likely in high regard. The client may simply be overwhelmed, overworked, and oblivious to the poor condition of the dog. Communication, diet correction, and willingness to work through the challenges of the situation with the client, rather than against them, could surprisingly result in a strengthening of the veterinary/client/patient relationship. If Dr. V refuses to see the client’s dog herself, it is Robin’s responsibility at that point to exercise her communication skills, tact, and respectfulness, to discuss the issue with the owner. If the owner has no desire to correct the problem, it is at that point that Robin may need to progress to notifying authorities of the suspected abuse if she feels this is necessary. No job is worth Robin losing her ethical and moral soundness. 6

This type of veterinary ethical dilemma is common and ongoing in practices across the country. It is easy to visualize these examples of micro-level decisions being made (at the level of the practitioner, as seen in this example). It is also easy to visualize veterinary ethics at a macro-level (at the level of policy and law makers). The interaction and constant change between these two divisions can be less clear. As stated by Peter Bahnson in an article for the Iowa State University Veterinarian, “In the minds of most people it seems that veterinary ethics is remote, extreme, or pedantic. Ethics is what brainy people do as they sit in their offices in ivory towers, or it is the “word from above” and as such is the “final” interpretation of right and wrong. At any rate, it is often felt that ethics has little to do with the real world of veterinary medicine.” 5

However, the ethical conundrums and decisions faced by individual practitioners on a daily basis provides a basic framework. Discussions of these decisions between peers of the veterinary community contributes to the formation of professional ethical guidelines. These guidelines, coupled with and representatives of the profession, eventually impact ever-changing laws and policies, and these established guidelines, laws, and policies then impact the ethical code of new and current individual practitioners. An individual’s personal morals will always weigh heaviest when making black and white ethical decisions, but sound and supported professional and legal ethical code helps filter the spectrum of gray.



References:

1. Patronek, GJ. Issues for Veterinarians in Recognizing and Reporting Animal Neglect and Abuse. *Society and Animals* 1997;5:3:267-280.
2. American Veterinary Medical Association website. Veterinarian's Oath. Available at: <https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/veterinarians-oath.aspx>. Accessed Dec 3, 2015.
3. American Veterinary Medical Association website. Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics of the AVMA. Available at: <http://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Principles-ofVeterinary-Medical-Ethics-of-the-AVMA.aspx>. Accessed Dec 3, 2015.
4. The Iowa Legislature. Chapter 717B Injury to Animals Other than Livestock. Available at: <https://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/CoolICE/default.asp?category=billinfo&service=IowaCode&ga=83&input=717B#717B.1>. Accessed Dec 3, 2015.
5. Bahnson, P. Veterinary Ethics: Ivory Tower or Everyday Choices? *Iowa State Veterinarian* 1986;48:1:7. Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/iowastate_veterinarian/vol48/iss1/7. Accessed Dec 3, 2015.



2016 President's Address 2016: Social Media, Ethics, and the Future of the Veterinary Profession

"Turning and turning in the widening gyre,
The falcon cannot hear the falconer." W. B. Yeats

On February 16, 2014 Dr. Shirley Koshi DVM, a practitioner in the Bronx, committed suicide. Shirley had come from India and had practiced for 30 years. A good Samaritan had brought in a very sick cat which Dr. Koshi brought back to health and adopted. Weeks later another person Gwen Jurmark claimed ownership of the cat. A lawsuit ensued, and this played out on the internet propelled by the "vetabusenetwork.com" and it's founder Julie Catalano. "Every day untold numbers of defenseless animals are left in the hands of some negligent, incompetent doctors who inflict cruelty, injury, and death on our pets- and get away with it." (1) Protesters organized a real protest outside Dr. Koshi's practice, she endured the public shaming from Facebook crowds and intense cyberbullying. Then the suicide.

In 2015, the America's Favorite Veterinarian contest sponsored by the American Veterinary Medical Foundation was cancelled following a vicious cyber-bullying attack "which disrupted and contaminated the final election process." Activists opposed to declawing cats virtually hijacked the contest designed to honor some of America's finest veterinarians. Veterinarians that did not perform declaws received a disproportionate vote, and those that did perform the procedure become subject to fraudulent negative advertisements, negative internet reviews, and threatening phone calls to their clinics. One contestant was called "a whore, a butcher, a mutilator, a hack, an animal hater, a disgrace to the profession." (2)

These are two examples of acts which one could characterize as the cyberbullying, mob mentality, modern day witch hunts that are described in detail elsewhere (3) and here: <http://thoughtcatalog.com/shahida-arabi/2016/06/20-diversion-tactics-highly-manipulative-narcissists-sociopaths-and-psychopaths-use-to-silence-you/>

Veterinarians are not prepared in any way for this phenomena, and it can intersect our lives in many ways. First, any statement or comment veterinarians put out there on any internet medium can be used by others for their own agendas. Remarks that are made can be easily taken out of context to demonize the author. Employees and clients videotape practice activities and post them on YouTube. Hate groups post messages on the hospital Facebook page. Virtually everyone has a smart phone-- ready to take photographs at a moment's notice.

All of these circumstances demand that veterinarians remain as ethically-minded and professional in every part of our lives-- both public and private. Social media is the way everyone



in the world communicates, and it can be both a blessing and a curse. The AVMA already has a well-developed Social Media Moderation Policy and a Websites Agreement and Terms of Use. After the debacle of the America's Favorite Veterinarian contest, the AVMA may be receptive to the suggestion of including education and training in social media in veterinary schools. Other professional organizations have similar terms of use policies for their online forums, including the Texas Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Veterinary Internal Medicine. However there are professional internet forums that have refused to enact posting guidelines or have any real content moderation.

I believe the AVMA should step up and add an independent/set apart "social media and ethics" curriculum to Standard 9 of the COE Accreditation Policies and Procedures. If anyone in the Society is interested in crafting a recommendation to the AVMA, please let me know. To properly train the new generations of veterinarians in the use of the medium they know best is our responsibility and imperative for the continued success of our profession.

**William Ray Folger DVM,MS,ABVP(Fe)
President, SVME**

1. Dvm360. Outrage over ownership dispute, veterinarian's death plays out on Internet. March 11, 2014
2. AVMA Press Release August 8, 2015
3. Cheng, J., Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, C. and Leskovec, J. Antisocial Behavior in Online Discussion Communities. Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence(www.aaai.org) 2015



Basic Veterinary Medical Ethics Course

The SVME Board of Directors approved of creating an on line CE course on Basic Veterinary Medical Ethics in 2010. It is intended as a resource offered to veterinary ethics educators, veterinary students, practicing veterinarians and paraprofessionals who are involved or interested in animal ethics.

An SVME Certificate of Completion is given to individuals finishing the course.

This course is dedicated to the late John McCarthy, DVM, Ph.D. for his visionary effort to initiate this body of work for on line access. The SVME recognizes and thanks all CE Committee Members: J. McCarthy, J. Peralta, A. Villalobos, L. Shapiro, D. Lawler, E. Danneman, D. Levitan, M.J. White, W. Koch, B. Rollin.

The SVME offers this Basic Veterinary Medical Ethics Course to guide and encourage discussion and understanding of animal ethics and bioethics.

The Course is RACE approved and opened for registration. Go to the "Events" page of the SVME website to register. Students who would like to take this course must apply for a free SVME Student membership. Others who would like to take this course must be or become SVME members.

VETETHICS Listserv is a great communication tool for SVME Members.

All SVME members are automatically entered into the VETETHICS Listserv.

SVME BOD members enter new topics or post interesting articles for discussion.

You are encouraged to ask your SVME Colleagues questions regarding ethical dilemmas that have disturbed you.

We encourage your comments on the various ethical topics under discussion.

**Meetings & Events*****Special Invitation for SVME Members*****SVME Annual Board Meeting & General Meeting**

February 4, 2017 Orlando, FL

The SVME Annual Board Meeting will be held in Orlando, FL during the NAVC Conference. The meeting will start AFTER the sessions are completed.

1pm – 5pm Hyatt Regency Orlando Room: Bayhill 19

2017 SVME Lectures: James Wilson: Pet Ownership

William Folger: Ethics in Social Media

Alice Villalobos: When is It Too Much Surgery:
Preventing Over Treatment at End of Life

2016-17 Shomer Award Honors James F. Wilson, DVM, JD

James F. Wilson, DVM, JD currently teaches veterinary law, ethics, business management, and career development at 18-20 veterinary schools each year throughout the USA. He has authored six books and over 130 articles in various veterinary journals. He reviews and/or helps draft approximately 40 employment contracts/year for lawyers, practice owners, specialists, and new graduate veterinarians. In 1994, Dr. Wilson was a founder of the American Veterinary Medical Law Association. During 1996, he was awarded the prestigious Clinical Sciences Teacher of the Year Award by the Student AVMA House of Delegates, the only time this has been awarded to a non-clinician.

2016 Student Essay Award Winner

Lisa Uhl was awarded the 2016 Student Essay Award for her essay **Veterinary Medical Ethics - A Spectrum of Gray**. Lisa is a member of the Class of 2018 attending Iowa State University, College of Veterinary Medicine. Lisa's complete essay can be found on Page 5 of this newsletter.



APPLICATION FORM

SOCIETY FOR VETERINARY MEDICAL ETHICS

NAME: _____

BUSINESS _____

ADDRESS: _____

HOME (optional) _____

ADDRESS: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

PLEASE SEND MAIL TO: ___Office ___Home

Business Phone: _____

Fax: _____

Home Phone: _____

OCCUPATIONAL AND PRESENT POSITION:

PROFESSIONAL DEGREES:

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS:

INTERESTS IN VETERINARY ETHICS:

MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE SOCIETY ARE:

To encourage ethical practices and professional behavior of veterinarians in all aspects of the profession.

To increase the understanding of the philosophical, social, moral and ethical values encountered by the veterinary profession.

To sponsor seminars and other presentations on ethics and values at local, state, regional and national meetings of veterinarians and other interested individuals.

To promote the teaching of ethical and value issues at colleges of veterinary medicine and to identify speakers on these subjects.

To encourage persons from other professions and disciplines, such as biomedical research, discussions and studies of these issues.

To exchange information about veterinary ethical issues via bulletins, periodicals, and newsletters.

To maintain archives of appropriate documents and materials related to these disciplines.

I hereby make application to the Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics

(Signature of Applicant)

(Date)

Dues are \$40 for Regular Membership & Free for students per year.

Please mail this completed & signed application to: John S. Wright, DVM, SVME Treasurer, Dept. of Veterinary Clinical Sciences, University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine, 1352 Boyd Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55108 (email: wright008@umn.edu)



SVME Mission Statement

c/o

John S. Wright, DVM, SVME Treasurer
Dept. of Veterinary Clinical Sciences
University of Minnesota College of
Veterinary Medicine
1352 Boyd Ave.
S. Paul, MN 55108



The Society for Veterinary Medical Ethics was founded in 1994 by a group of veterinarians, biomedical researchers and academics to promote discussion and debate about ethical issues arising in and relevant to veterinary practice. The SVME publishes a newsletter, provides a listserv, holds an annual meeting at the AVMA convention, sponsors an annual student essay contest and honors an individual annually with the Shomer Award for outstanding contributions to veterinary medical ethics.

Individuals interested in information or in joining the SVME can visit the SVME website below to learn more about the organization.

www.svme.org/

SVME Board of Directors member list:

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