

DO YOU WORK WITH A VETERINARIAN? RESPECT HIS PROFESSIONAL INDEPENDENCE!



When exercising their profession, veterinarians are expected to safeguard their professional independence at all times and in all circumstances. They must be able to make informed decisions without external pressure from a third party and be free from any influence, thereby prioritizing the interests of the animals, the client and the maintenance of public health.

WHAT DOES THE CODE OF ETHICS OF VETERINARIANS SAY?

- 👁 Veterinarians must put the interest of their client and the animal before their own or that of the company for which they work. (CE, s. 14)
- 👁 Veterinarians must safeguard their professional independence at all times and avoid any situation in which they could potentially be in conflict of interest. (CE, s. 17 and s. 19)
- 👁 Veterinarians must ignore any intervention that does not respect their decision-making autonomy. (CE, s. 16)
- 👁 Veterinarians must ensure that the persons they employ or those who are associated with them comply with the Code of Ethics and the laws and regulations governing the practice of their profession. This concept also applies to the notion of professional independence. (CE, s. 1.1 and s. 1.2)

At all times and no matter how difficult it is to do so despite pressure from a third party, veterinarians must act with integrity by demonstrating honesty, ethics, responsibility, honour and independence in their choices, decisions and actions.

CONCRETELY, THIS MEANS THAT:

- 👁 Veterinarians are solely responsible for their decisions and actions, and as such, they are also solely responsible for the consequences. Independence goes hand-in-hand with accountability.
- 👁 Veterinarians must not allow themselves to be influenced by a third party (pharmaceutical company, slaughterhouse owner, animal health technician, company director, manager, etc.) in performing their duties.
- 👁 Veterinarians must make their decisions exclusively based on the interest of the animal, the client or public health; consequently, decisions should not be based on financial profit or any other advantage that a situation may entail.



The hierarchical relationship and the duty of loyalty of the professional toward their employer cannot justify the commission of acts that are derogatory or contrary to the standards generally recognized in the profession. The courts confirm this: “(...) as a professional, the Respondent had ethical obligations that went beyond the directives she could receive from her employer”

- Chambre de l'assurance de dommages c. Légaré, 2010 CanLII 64055

You must be aware of the ethical obligations of veterinarians and respect them. Professional independence must be facilitated, encouraged and valued within the various working environments of veterinarians. Your contribution is essential to protecting the public and the profession's reputation.

SCENARIOS

To help you better understand, you will find below a series of scenarios where a third party involvement risks to undermine the independence of the veterinarian. Beware! If any of these examples feel familiar, it is time to start a dialogue with the veterinarian to rectify the situation.

EMPLOYER – VETERINARY FACILITY



1. A new veterinarian employee asks you to order a medication that you do not carry in your pharmacy because it is not part of a group buying agreement for which you normally receive a discount on the number of units procured.

As an employer, you should not deny a veterinarian the right to prescribe the medication he deems most appropriate for his patient. If you do not wish to keep this medication in stock, you should at least allow occasional orders or provide a prescription to the client so they can obtain it from another facility or pharmacy.

Code of ethics s. 1.1



2. To recruit a new veterinarian within your organization, you decide to offer in addition to a base salary, further compensation in the form of a commission on the services and products sold.

This practice places your future employee in an apparent conflict of interest since an outside observer could conclude that the veterinarian would benefit from recommending additional tests and prescribing more medications than necessary. This situation demonstrates why it is unacceptable for veterinarians to accept a commission when practising their profession.

Code of ethics s. 14 and 19.2

For his part, a veterinarian employer may not offer a commission, a rebate, an advantage or any other special consideration in relation to the practice of his profession.

Code of ethics s. 19.3

Although the Ordre has no legal means of prohibiting non-veterinarian employers from adopting certain remuneration practices, you must be aware of the ethical obligations of veterinarians that you could thereby compromise.

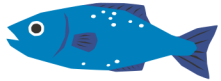


3. Following your quarterly review of the services sold by your establishment, you notice that the number of dental services has constantly decreased since the beginning of the year. In a meeting with your team, you present the facts and propose a plan to rectify the situation, requiring your veterinarian employees to recommend dental services to all patients.

However, in performing their duties, veterinarians should disregard any pressure from a third party in order to maintain their professional autonomy. Therefore, they cannot accept your request without violating their Code of ethics.

Code of ethics s. 16

CLIENT



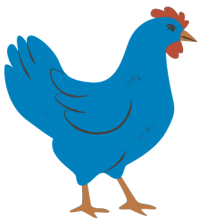
4. The aquaculture technician provides you with a list of medications they deem necessary for your fish farm. When the veterinarian arrives, you request the medications recommended by this technician to add to your pharmacy.

Veterinarians must maintain their professional autonomy. They must ignore the pressure from third parties, including that from their clients, particularly if what is asked of them is not justified nor is it in accordance with scientific standards or risks harming the animals, the client or public health.

Code of ethics s. 16

In this situation, it is important to remember that the professional must always maintain adequate control of medication sales and be able to justify their prescriptions.

Code of ethics s. 9



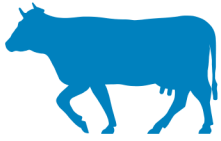
5. As owner of a poultry farm, your code of practice and the rules regarding antibiotic governance recommends reducing the use of preventive antibiotics and improving biosafety measures. However, you are unwilling to change your way of doing things. You urge your veterinarian to prescribe more preventive antibiotics to compensate for poor management.

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Code of ethics s. 9



6. You require antibiotics for your dairy herd as prescribed by the veterinarian. The pharmaceutical representative offers you a scaled discount on purchasing a batch of 20 bottles. However, the prescription of the veterinarian calls for 15 bottles. You ask the veterinarian to increase his prescription to get the discount.

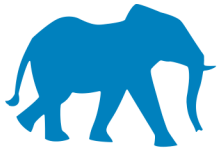
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Code of ethics s. 9

ELECTED OFFICIAL



7. There is a new zoo in Oursville. To obtain an operating permit, the owner must ensure the services of a veterinarian who will, among other things, provide animal care. As mayor of the city, you are tempted to meet with the veterinarian to inform them that: "It is in your best interest to carry out a good inspection because, otherwise, the zoo risks closing and this would be unfortunate because the economic spinoffs of this attraction are significant, but above all beneficial for Oursville, your hometown."

The veterinarian must carry on their professional activities with integrity, s. 9. In exercising their profession, veterinarians must avoid allowing outside information to interfere with their professional judgment. Such pressure would not only put them in an uncomfortable situation but might even oblige them to refuse to provide services to the zoo.

Code of ethics s. 12 and 16

ANIMAL CARE TECHNICIAN



8. An animal health technician (AHT) employed by an educational institution collaborates with veterinarian educators. Regularly, the AHT questions the medical decisions of one of the educators. In addition, the AHT consults with you as an educator in the same establishment to obtain your medical opinion and then returns to the attending veterinarian to inform them that they should not operate like this.

Criticizing a colleague's work is derogatory. As a veterinarian, you must ensure you have knowledge of all the facts before offering an opinion. Moreover, a veterinarian must exercise their duties in a professional manner with those they are in contact with, thereby not, abusing the good faith of any person.

Code of ethics s. 47

In such circumstances, it would be understandable for the veterinarian not to change his intervention plan, especially if he considers the comments unjustified. Veterinarians must act by demonstrating independence in their choices, decisions and actions, even under pressure from a third party. If you have reason to believe that a colleague does not practice according to recognized standards of practice, it is best to discuss it directly with him or contact the Syndic's Office.

Code of ethics s. 16 and s. 45.11

MANAGER



9. As part of a meat inspection, a veterinarian requests a stoppage of the production line in order to verify the carcasses adequately. This measure will permit the veterinarian to properly approve or condemn meats for consumption. As a supervisor, you know that this interruption will cause economic damage and you are tempted to restart the line.

Veterinarians must perform their duties with integrity while also keeping in mind that their primary objective is the protection of public health. Permitting the manager to restart the production line too quickly will ultimately lead the professional to reduce the quality of his work. The intervention of a third party must not impact the veterinarian to fulfill his ethical obligations.

Code of ethics s. 16

THE MANDATE OF THE ORDRE: PUBLIC PROTECTION

The mandate of the Ordre des médecins vétérinaires du Québec is to ensure the protection of the public. To this end, the Ordre oversees and monitors the practice of the profession and oversees the professional development of veterinarians with the aim of fully contributing to public health and animal health and welfare.

Raising awareness among the public, veterinary medicine professionals, their employers, partners and suppliers of the importance of professional independence is one way to fulfil this mission.

QUESTIONS?

Do you work with a veterinarian and are interested in learning more about what professional independence entails? Would you like to validate the behaviour to adopt in a specific situation? Contact us at info@omvq.qc.ca.

