

Animal welfare at FAVA



Animal welfare was front and centre at the Federation of Asian Veterinary Associations (FAVA) meeting in Singapore in November 2014. A panel of international animal welfare experts challenged attendees to think about why animal welfare is so important in order to improve it and to look at how the notion of 'welfare' can be measured effectively. We all assume that we know what animal welfare is, but there is no simple definition, and it means different things to different cultures and different people.

For example, the OIE Animal Welfare Definition (Policy) has a different perspective than the effect on the animals themselves, and states, "Animal welfare is a complex international public policy issue, with important scientific, ethical, economic, cultural, religious and political dimensions and which also raises important international trade policy issues".

One of the highlights for me was hearing Professor David J Mellor from the Collaborating Centre for Animal Welfare Science and Bioethical Analysis at Massey University, give an overview of the development of concepts of animal welfare that he said was built on three decades of diverse animal welfare science investigation.

Professor Mellor asserted that ideas of animal welfare have changed over time and alternative definitions have developed. Increasing knowledge of animal functionality has affected the thinking on animal welfare and how to define it, as has societal views about animals and how they should be treated.

He followed the development of ideas, starting with the three key orientations towards animal welfare assessment of biological functioning, affective state and natural living. Biological functioning relates to the concept that animal welfare is good when animals are healthy, growing and reproducing well, and are producing good meat, milk, eggs and fibre. At the time this concept was developed, animals' experience was generally excluded.

Professor Mellor also discussed how, in the affective state, animals can have negative and positive experiences in their interactions with other animals, people and the environment. So welfare is good when there is little or no suffering, and some positive experiences are present. Animals' feelings and/or experiences were extrapolated from human experience, but could only be measured by behavioural observation. The 'natural

state' orientation suggested that animal welfare is good when conditions are similar to their ancestors' natural or wild state.

He looked at the 'Five Freedoms', which were developed in 1979, but only related to minimising thirst, hunger, discomfort, pain, fear and distress. The animals' perceived 'quality of life' was not incorporated.

Quality of life aims to promote positive welfare states while still minimising negative states. To avoid the notion quality of life being a human construct, the animal welfare-related concepts are described as 'a life not worth living', 'a life worth avoiding', 'a life worth living' and 'a good life'.

Professor Mellor went on to describe the Five Domains model, which was designed to aid systematic assessment of animal welfare. The five domains are nutrition, environment, health, behaviour and mental state.

The model focusses on areas of potential welfare compromise as well as positive welfare. It has four physical or functional domains and one mental domain. The experiences in the mental domain equate to the animal welfare state. An animal has good welfare when its nutritional, environmental, physical health, behavioural and mental needs are met, and so animals should be managed in ways that both minimise negative mental states and promote positive mental states.

The separation of the physical or functional and mental domains highlights most potential sources of welfare compromise or enhancement. The negative affects are assessed using mainly physical/functional indices and the positive affects are mainly assessed using behavioural indices.

He noted that actual measurement was not always necessary, and that knowledgeable and good husbandry and veterinary care are sufficient to minimise the physical or functional disruptions that give rise to negative affective states of animal welfare concern. Professor Mellor stressed that minimising such disruptions does not usually result in positive welfare states – merely neutral states – and that exclusive minimisation of negative affects mainly deals with survival-critical biological function, not welfare enhancement.

Welfare compromise is graded in terms of an overall negative affect: A (low) to E (high) on a 5-point scale. Positive affects are associated with pleasurable experiences and can be assessed by available opportunities and the use of any behaviour opportunities provided in the facilities. They can be graded as the degree of enhanced welfare on a 4-point scale of 'none', 'low', 'medium' or 'high': 0, +, ++ or +++. This helps to identify when husbandry and therapeutic interventions are required.

Professor Mellor concluded that attention must always be given to minimising, negative affective states, but for animal welfare to be balanced, there should also be opportunities for animals to experience positive welfare states.

To hear more about Professor Mellor's work in this area, don't miss the Pan Pacific Veterinary Conference in May in Brisbane.

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