Attitudes of Taiwan veterinarians towards animal welfare

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Abstract

A survey was carried out to examine the attitudes of veterinarians in Taiwan towards animal welfare issues and current systems related to animal protection. The respondents were asked to express the extent to which they agreed with the importance of the Five Freedoms and relevant education in animal welfare. The survey was sent to 889 veterinarians and the response rate was 34%. According to the findings, veterinarians in Taiwan consider that current animal protection laws in Taiwan, and their relevant systems, are unable to protect animals effectively. They mostly have an uncertain attitude towards the statement that animal welfare can upgrade their professional abilities or enhance their image, in that they have a relative lack of awareness of animal welfare as well as also lacking further understanding of the importance and influence of animal welfare. However, many veterinarians strongly support the content of 'The Five Freedoms' and relevant training of animal welfare and ethics. Instead of denying the necessity and importance of the relevant issues, we consider that some veterinarians lack confidence in animal welfare merely because of a lack of relevant training. The results of the survey indicate that providing veterinarians with professional education of animal welfare is the first step which brooks no delay.

Keywords: animal protection law, animal welfare, animal welfare, attitude, education, Taiwan, veterinarians

Introduction

The general animal welfare legislation in Taiwan, which is known as the ‘Taiwan Animal Protection Law’ (TAP), has been in place since 1998, and the amended version came into effect in 2011 (Anonymous 2011a). As Taiwan is one of the few countries which has promulgated a general animal welfare legislation and criminalised the offence of animal cruelty in Asia, it might be assumed that the level of animal welfare in Taiwan would be higher than that of other neighbouring countries (Favre & Hall 2004; Whitfort & Woodhouse 2010). However, the truth is that the legislation of the TAP was developed in too limited a time, due to international pressure (Lee 1999). The effectiveness of the TAP and its new criminal provisions might both be questionable and the public’s knowledge of the law is also inadequate (Weng et al 2006).

On the other hand, amongst veterinarians, it is generally acknowledged that the veterinary profession plays a significant role in animal welfare issues, particularly in research, clinical care and the animal protection movement (Hewson 2003a, 2004a,b, 2005, 2006; Easton 2004; Boo & Knight 2006; WSPA 2012). Their positions and attitudes towards animals are an indicator of animal welfare standards, and are fundamental in preventing animals from unnecessary suffering and improving their welfare status in practice (Williams 2002; Hewson 2003a; Becker & French 2004; Sabuncuoglu & Coban 2008). However, neither the Taiwan Animal Protection Law nor the Taiwan Veterinarian Act assigns animal welfare implementation duties to clinical veterinarians or official veterinarians (Anonymous 2009, 2011a), both of which may result in an inability to enforce the law (Striwing 2002). Moreover, unlike other countries, the national veterinary profession groups in Taiwan (Anonymous 2012) have not included animal welfare in their policies or objectives, let alone provided veterinary education on animal welfare (Hewson 2004a,b, 2005; Boo & Knight 2006). Prior to 2012, the four veterinary schools in Taiwan did not have a single relevant module on animal welfare in a compulsory course, and only two of them provided a general introduction to animal welfare in optional courses.

It is still not clear why veterinary profession groups and academic units in Taiwan pay less attention to animal welfare issues; however, understanding how different animal welfare participants perceive their role should be a precondition for the successful improvement of animal welfare (Kauppinen et al 2010). Several studies have