

As a student aspiring to become a veterinarian, I feel that being exposed to the "good, bad, and the ugly" is essential in developing an explicit and realistic view of what is expected of a veterinarian's individual attainment and moral standings. Throughout my internship at the Anamosa Veterinary Clinic I observed as two veterinarians go about handling the several ethical debates they faced everyday. As I have matured throughout my veterinary medical experiences, it has become increasingly more important for me to establish my own moral and ethical standards that I plan on following through with in my practice, and working with large animals has given me an entirely different set of ethical debates for analysis. Three overlying debates circle my mind as I approach the days of Veterinary school; specifically, onychectomy, abortion/spaying/neutering, and dehorning.

Onychectomy or declawing is a procedure that involves the surgical removal of the third digital phalanx. Until only recently, the procedure was carried out using a scalpel; resulting in regular difficulties with patient bleeding, swelling, infection, and especially pain. Thanks to Einstein, who in the 1920's developed the idea of a concentrated light beam, veterinary medicine -and the animals- now enjoy the many benefits laser surgery offers. Dr. Darrow had such a laser, and explained the relief and peace of mind he has been given as a result of such an advancement. Simply stated, the energy created by the carbon dioxide laser is absorbed by the water of the tissues to be cut, it vaporizes this water, allowing surgeons to remove the tissue, cauterizing the tissues and nerve endings surrounding it, resulting in little to no bleeding, swelling, and markedly lower pain for the patient. As a veterinarian, I will feel more confident knowing that with the many advances in modern medicine, I can offer a service to clients and make it as painless as possible for the animals.

In my experience with veterinarians, I have seen drastically different philosophies and justifications for accepting or denying a procedure. As a veterinarian, I plan to reassess these issues and look at the greater good of what I am doing. Knowing that I can make a procedure as painless as possible utilizing the advancements of medicine gives me peace of mind, and allows me to focus on the greater good.

In the rare case of abortion in veterinary medicine, the problem typically lies in a one-or-nothing survival prognosis, that is, abortion in cats and dogs is usually a case where the mother's own health is an issue, and in this case, my decision is already made, but in more trying cases where a client does not want to worry about the kittens and that there is an estimated 70 million feral cats in the United States- and this number is expected to rise- I have found myself straddling the fence. Because of the few feline and canine abortions I have witnessed, I have had the incredible opportunity to observe first hand the different stages of gestation, exploring the placement and development of offspring *in utero*. As a young scientist, this was fascinating and I was thankful for the learning opportunity, as for the justification behind the abortion, I found myself with no one to turn to but myself, and plan to do everything I can to find a shelter or an adopting family before performing such a procedure.

It was my first ride out in the country with Dr. Darrow that this appreciation of the greater good began to race through my mind. As I helped him unhook the chute hitched behind his truck, I started feeling myself being pulled deeper and deeper into the moment. I took a deep breath and looked around at what the 7:00 sunrise had cast on the seemingly endless acres of rolling farmland. Darrow and I met with the owner; a short middle-aged man with beaming blue eyes and an unusually large wad of chewing tobacco

in his lower lip. Apart from the obvious stereotypes that I no doubt assume we could all be formulating at this point, I watched as he mounted his horse and herded his cattle to the ring almost effortlessly. I watched as he rubbed the noses of each bull as they entered the chute to be castrated and dehorned. He cared about these cattle. Suddenly, the clash between the seemingly painful and bloody mess left behind from dehorning, and the fact that the procedure is vital to this hardworking family's business began to turn my stomach. I began conducting research, knowing that if dehorning were to be a problem for me, then large animal veterinary work is no longer on my list of specialty. If I were to follow through with such a procedure, I want to know that I am doing everything possible to alleviate the pain that these animals endure. In an article published by *The Veterinary Journal* (Volume 169, Issue 3, May 2005, Pages 337-349) the authors show that significantly lower cortisol responses are present in cattle dehorned through cautery versus amputation, and that local anesthetics, the sedative xylazine, and NSAIDs given before and after dehorning optimizes pain management. Here arises the debate between animal rights and animal welfare.

Animal rights is essentially the complete abolition of domestication and includes honoring rights to reproduction and freedom from being used as means of aesthetic pleasure, food and dairy production. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) is a group that hopes to "free animals of their domestication".

Animal welfare is the notion of accepting conditions the way they are and essentially making the best of the situation by easing pain and increasing the quality of life for domesticated animals. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to

Animals (ASPCA) is an organization on this side of the debate. ASPCA holds insurance plans for owners and is currently the animal police in several cities across the nation.

I find myself favoring the views of animal welfare. In my personal opinion, domestication of several animals has advanced to the point of no return, and several animals would be unable to survive long enough to have offspring without the assistance of their human counterparts. This is not an assumption I come to easily, rather, a conclusion I've reached after viewing countless cases of animal cruelty derived from starvation and lack of grooming or providing ideal living conditions. The problem stretches over to long and agonizing deaths of animals not vaccinated for parvo, parainfluenza, rabies or kennel cough; all very deadly, but avoidable ailments that would be impossible without veterinary medicine.

My experiences at the Anamosa Veterinary Clinic have solidified any underlying doubt I had in the veterinary profession. I feel confident that I will be able to serve both my clients and their animals by utilizing the advancements of veterinary. It is my intention to start a mixed animal practice that includes the many benefits of veterinary medicine; practicing onychectomy, castrations and hysterectomies with a carbon dioxide laser, access to xylazine and any other necessary local anesthetics for cases of dehorning or amputation, and an appreciation for the assessment of pain and relieving animal suffering.