

VCSL



CODE OF CONDCUT  
FOR  
VETERINARY SURGEONS

**Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka**

**January 2023**

# **Code of Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons**



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This document on Code of Conduct provides veterinarians in Sri Lanka with a set of guidelines to make good decisions in work environment. Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka (VCSL) strives to enhance moral standards which foster harmony among the professional colleagues and elevate their reputation among the clients and colleagues. The Council expects the licensed members of this learned profession to abide by the principles stipulated in this Code of Conduct in practicing the profession with compassion and respect for animal welfare and public health.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A profession can be defined as a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a higher level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and the skills in the interest of all the stakeholders. In a profession, guideline generated with reference to a code of conduct will govern the activities of such profession. Guidelines will require behavior and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual.

The main purpose of this publication by the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka is to update set of standards and guidelines of professional conduct for registered veterinarians under the oath (Appendix I). This document has reference to professional conduct and activities of veterinarians both on their own accounts and as a group of professionals in their relationships with patients, clients, colleagues and the community. Failure to abide by this code of conduct may lead to disciplinary action by VCSL.

Professional misconduct is defined as action taken or failed to be taken by a veterinarian in the course of professional work, which could be seriously regarded as disgraceful or dishonest by colleagues of good repute or competence. This is more so when public interests and / or welfare of patient are involved.

Veterinarians have a responsibility to maintain and improve the health, welfare and productivity of animals under all circumstances. Changes in society, science and the law constantly raise new ethical issues regarding animals and may challenge existing ethical perspectives.

Veterinary surgeons should ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to their care and to fulfill their professional responsibilities, by maintaining five principles of practice namely,

1. Professional competence
2. Honesty and integrity
3. Independence and impartiality
4. Client confidentiality and trust
5. Professional accountability

The community and the clients are entitled to expect that a veterinarian will always:

- a) consider the respectful treatment of the animal;
- b) strive to provide the best possible veterinary services in animal health, production and welfare;
- c) attempt to advice on feeding, breeding and management of animals
- d) take responsibility to uphold the good reputation and integrity of the veterinary profession;
- e) foster and maintain good communication and relationship with clients, with trust and empathy respecting client confidentiality;
- f) understand and comply with all laws of Sri Lanka relevant to veterinary profession;
- g) adhere to any guidelines or recommendations set forth by national and international authorities applicable for veterinary profession;
- h) strengthen relationships with professional colleagues and share expertise where appropriate;
- i) maintain and continue to enhance professional knowledge and skills to improve quality of service.

## **GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **1. Acts pertaining to veterinary profession**

Every veterinary surgeon registered under the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka should be aware of all the Acts and regulations pertaining to the profession e.g. The Veterinary Surgeons and Practitioners Act No.46 of 1956, Animals Act No 29 of 1958, Animal Diseases Act No 59 of 1992, Animal Feed Act No 15 of 1986, etc.

### **2. Obligations of the veterinary surgeon as a member of a learned profession**

The veterinary surgeon being a member of a learned and skilled profession, his conduct should be governed by a strict code of ethics than that applies to the ordinary citizen.

### **3. Infamous conduct**

3.1 Conduct which may be regarded as infamous in terms of section 25 of the Veterinary Surgeons and Practitioners Act No.46 of 1956 stipulates the conduct disgraceful in a professional respect. In each case, the council will decide on the basis of the facts presented before it, whether a registered veterinary surgeon has been guilty of conduct disgraceful in a professional respect.

3.2 As a representative of the profession, a veterinarian should never refuse to advice a client and/or treat an animal. If it he/she is unable to do so due to unavoidable reasons he/she may refer the case to a colleague.

### **4. Veterinary services and care in animal health and production**

4.1 Veterinary surgeon must provide veterinary services and care that is appropriate and adequate. Veterinary surgeon is personally accountable for his professional practice and must always be prepared to justify his decisions and actions.

When providing services and care, Veterinary surgeon should:

- a) take adequate and appropriate measures to restrain of the animal to ensure minimum stress and maximum comfort;
- b) encourage client to handle animals as gently and safely as circumstances allow;
- c) take best possible interventions for health care and production of animals;
- d) ensure that a range of treatment options are offered and explained, including prognoses and possible side effects;
- e) recommend appropriate preventive measures and provide suitable management and treatment for disease conditions;
- f) not condone animal suffering, nor be party to it despite client's commercial, financial, emotional or other circumstances;

- g) obtain the client's consent to treatment unless delay would adversely affect the animal's welfare (to give informed consent, clients must be aware of risks);
- h) consider the welfare implications of any surgical or other procedure involving animals and act or advise appropriately;
- i) adhere to best practices in assessment and management of pain in all interventions. If termination of pain and suffering requires, veterinarians may consider euthanasia considering the quality of life (Appendix. II);
- j) promote humane handling and management of domestic, farm, feral and wild animals. If culling or the euthanasia of animals is deemed necessary, it should be carried out as humanely as possible with due consideration to the individual animal and to the group from which it is drawn;
- k) provide aid to sick or injured animals in an emergency and having regard to legal requirements within the limits of available resources;
- l) ensure that the highest standards of management, animal handling and analgesia are used at all times, including research and teaching in complying with the relevant laws of Sri Lanka;
- m) be responsible for proper handling and storage of pharmaceuticals and biologicals as per the product recommendations and special care should be given to controlled substances that has a potential abuse;
- n) provide guidance to co-workers on relevant aspects of animal welfare and management in the work place;
- o) consult suitably trained colleagues, either within or outside the practice, when novel or unfamiliar procedures might be under consideration or undertaken.

## **5. Registration of practice premises**

5.1 All animal holding facilities, clinics and hospitals should be registered under the regulations of the Animal diseases Act No 59 of 1992.

5.2 All premises should conform to the conditions laid down in the regulation under the Animal diseases Act No 59 of 1992 and the standards specified by the VCSL from time to time.

## **6. Canvassing, advertising, signboards, nameplates and professional stationery**

### **6.1 Canvassing:**

It is unprofessional for a veterinary surgeon to canvass or tout for practice whether by himself or through others.

### **6.2 Advertising:**

Advertising and publicity may involve many forms with the aim of providing information to others and attracting new business. Any advertising and publicity should be professional, accurate, truthful and limited only to the facilities and services available. It should not be of a character likely to bring the profession into disrepute. Advertising and publicity should not be misleading or exploit an animal owners' lack of veterinary knowledge. Practice websites and professional social media pages should be kept up to date.

### 6.3 Sign boards:

Veterinary surgeons have a duty to see that their premises can be found without undue difficulty by members of the public seeking their services. For this purpose, professional premises may be identified by one sign board reading “Veterinary/Animal Hospital” or “Veterinary/Animal Clinic” or “Veterinary Surgery” etc., in an appropriate language. In addition indicate the practicing hours, of attendance and if desired the telephone number of the practice and any information which indicates where veterinary advice or assistance may be sought when the clinic is closed. No other information should be given on the sign board. The lettering should be in navy blue color with white background. The size and design of the sign board should be such as is consistent with the professional approach to the provision of information for members of the public and should not give the appearance of a commercial sign intended to attract customers.

### 6.4 Name plates:

All premises from which veterinary services are provided should bear a name plate on the building itself or at some appropriate point adjacent to the building. Such a name plate should contain no information others than the following:

- a) The name/s of the veterinary surgeon/s and respective VCSL registration number/s.
- b) Letters indicating the qualifications as entered against the names of each veterinarian in the latest gazette of the registered Veterinary Surgeons in Sri Lanka.
- c) The title of “Veterinary Surgeon (s)” as the case may be.
- d) Individual name plates must not exceed 24’’×12’’ in size and should be designed in a dignified and professional style. In a setting with multiple veterinarians, the size can be determined accordingly.

### 6.5 Professional stationery:

Professional notepaper, invoices/receipts, visiting cards or any other professional stationery should contain generally the following:

- a) The name of the veterinarian (or the names in a group practice), qualifications and the VCSL registration number/s.
- b) The address (or in the case of more than one set of premises, the main and subsidiary addresses).

## **7. Using Dr. as a prefix**

A registered veterinary surgeons may use the title 'Doctor' or 'Dr' ('the title'). The veterinary surgeon should use their name, and the post-nominal letters of veterinary degree BVSc or equivalent.

## **8. Change of address and contact details**

Any change in the address and the contact details shall be notified to the Registrar of the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka. These changes may also be informed to the clients.



## **9. Media and broadcasting**

Contribution of articles, interviews, discussions, conferences etc. in the mass media or social media is permissible provided it is clear that;

- a) Such a contribution is not inspired by a desire to promote the veterinary surgeon's personal interest.
- b) The action is not detrimental to the interests of profession. While contributing to the mass or social media, the anonymity need not be maintained. However, one should not abuse one's position nor attempt to acquire personal publicity.

## **10. Testimonials**

It is unprofessional for a practicing veterinary surgeon to give any testimonial intended for sales promotion, in favor of patent articles, medicines or animal feed for commercializing purpose.

## **11. Scientific articles**

When a veterinary surgeon is the author of an article, it is unprofessional for him to promote the reprinting of all or part of the article to be used for the advertisement or sale of any product to the general public. He may, however, send reports to the manufacturer or distributor for the purposes of disseminating knowledge.

## **RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE VETERINARIANS**

### **1. Obligations of veterinary surgeons to one another**

Every veterinary surgeon is duty bound to promote the interests, honor and dignity of the veterinary profession and to maintain professional relationship with peers. Relationship of the veterinary surgeons to each other must be founded on honor and good faith.

### **2. Consultations**

If a veterinary surgeon at the invitation of another veterinary surgeon in attendance on a case assists in treatment or in arriving at a diagnosis, prognosis or treatment, the former may be regarded as a consultant.

Consultations may occur on a suggestion from the attending veterinary surgeon or from the owner. A consultant may attend only with prior consent of the veterinary surgeon in attendance. When requested by a client, a veterinary surgeon attending to a particular case should call in consultation.

If the consultant were to see the client's patient without the attending veterinary surgeon, he should inform the latter of the condition of the patient, his findings, and his opinions of the attending veterinary surgeon as soon as is practicable.

### **3. Referrals and second opinions**

Veterinary surgeons should facilitate a client's request for a referral or second opinion by another veterinary surgeon.

A referral may be for a diagnosis, procedure and/or possible treatment, after which the case is returned to the referring veterinary surgeon, whereas a second opinion is only for the purpose of seeking the views of another veterinary surgeon. Neither a second-opinion veterinary surgeon nor a referral practice should ever seek to take over the case unless the client chooses to change the veterinary surgeon.

#### **3.1 When to refer**

Veterinary surgeons should recognize when a case or a treatment option is outside their area of competence and be prepared to refer it to a colleague.

The Veterinary surgeon should make a referral appropriate to the case. When considering what is appropriate, the veterinary surgeon should consider all relevant factors. These might include the ability, experience and the facilities available, of the referral veterinary surgeon, the location of the service, the urgency of treatment and the circumstances of the owner. In some such cases, the veterinary surgeon may consider that they cannot be party to such a referral relationship.



The referring veterinary surgeon has a responsibility to ensure that the client is made aware of the level of expertise of appropriate and reasonably available referral veterinary surgeons, for example, whether they are veterinary specialists or advanced practitioners.

Both the referring veterinary surgeon and the referral veterinary surgeon have a responsibility to ensure that the client has an understanding of the likely cost arising from the referral.

### 3.2 Process of referring a case

The initial contact should be made by the referring veterinary surgeon, and the referral veterinary surgeon should be asked to arrange the appointment. The referring veterinary surgeon should provide the referral veterinary surgeon with the case history, treatments used and any relevant laboratory results, radiographs, scanning reports etc. Any further information that may be requested should be supplied promptly.

## 4. Fees

It is best that the client is made aware of the costs involved prior to attempting diagnostics and treatments. The fees that may be charged should be reasonable.

## 5. Disputes

There should not be professional disputes among the veterinary surgeons. Wherever possible they should resolve disputes among themselves amicably. Unresolved disputes may be reported to the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka and advice sought.

## 6. Records

A veterinary practitioner must ensure that a detailed record of any consultation, procedure or treatment is made as soon as is practicable. The record must be legible and in sufficient detail to enable another veterinary practitioner to continue the treatment of the animal, and must include the results of any diagnostic tests, analysis and treatments. If a record is altered, the alteration must be clearly identified in the record as such. A veterinary practitioner must ensure that all records of any consultation, procedure or treatment are retained for at least 3 years after they are made.

## 7. Reporting of malpractices

A veterinary surgeon shall be honest in all professional interactions, and report veterinarians who are deficient in character or competence to the appropriate entities. Veterinarians shall report illegal practices and activities to the veterinary council.



## **8. Continuous professional development**

A veterinarian shall continue to study, apply, and advance scientific knowledge, maintain a commitment to veterinary medical education, make relevant information available to clients, colleagues, the public, and obtain consultation or referral when indicated.

## **9. Influences on judgement**

The medical judgments of veterinarians shall not be influenced by contracts or agreements made by their associations or societies.

## **10. Genetic defects**

Performance of surgical or other procedures in any species for the purpose of concealing genetic defects in animals to be shown, raced, bred, or sold is unethical. However, should the health or welfare of the individual patient require correction of such genetic defects, it is recommended that the patient be rendered incapable of reproduction.

## THE VETERINARY SURGEON AND THE LAW

Veterinarians must be familiar with and abide by all relevant legislation and guidelines affecting their professional activity and behavior. Veterinarians must not practice without being registered with the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka.

- a) Veterinarians must comply with all legislative provisions when prescribing, authorizing and dispensing veterinary medicinal products and animal feed products.
- b) Veterinarians must not abuse the authority to prescribe or obtain restricted substances or drugs of addiction.
- c) All written prescriptions should be legible, technically accurate and should not be used to promote specific products or brands.
- d) All prescriptions issued by a veterinary surgeon shall be in order and authentic.
- e) Veterinarians should be familiar with the animal welfare legislation in the jurisdiction(s) in which they practice. They should also take such reasonable steps to acquaint their clients, employees, co-workers and any other people responsible for the care and husbandry of animals with which they have contact, with such provisions as may appear to be relevant and applicable at the time.
- f) Veterinarians involved in research or teaching using animals must be familiar with the relevant animal welfare legislation, codes of practice and the role of the animal ethics committee at the institution/organization where the research or teaching is conducted.
- g) Whilst upholding the principle of confidentiality, veterinarians must do so within the constraints of the law and with regard to their statutory obligations. Any information gained by a veterinary surgeon concerning a patient under his or her care to be treated as confidential and to be divulged to the owner alone. With the owner's consent only the information could be divulged to others if necessary. However, this does not apply if the veterinary surgeon has to divulge this information in terms of the Animals Diseases Act or other legislative enactments, or if the public welfare or the welfare of other animals is endangered.
- h) If required to divulge information, for example as a witness in court, veterinarians should divulge only that information which is relevant to the case and take care to differentiate factual information from opinion. When providing evidence as an expert witness, a veterinarian may offer a professional opinion. Such opinion should be confined to areas where the veterinarian has particular expertise and personal experience.
- i) It is the responsibility of the veterinarians to maintain medical records at least for a period of five years.

### 1. Issue of Certificates

A veterinary surgeon is duty bound in certain cases, when requested to do so, to issue certificates signed by him in his professional capacity for their subsequent use in the courts of law or for administration purpose.

When certificates are issued in respect to animals, wherever possible, the certificate should contain all the relevant information for the animals to be identified. Official stamp and the signature of the veterinarian should be placed on the certificate.

## **2. Evidence**

When a veterinary surgeon by reason of his professional status is called upon to give evidence in a Court of law, the evidence must be given with the purpose of seeing that justice is done. If a veterinary surgeon is called by a party to an action to give evidence, he should do so as a professional person to assist the court.

## **APPENDIX**

### ***Appendix I***

#### **VETERINARIANS OATH**

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, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock 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.

## *Appendix II*

### **EUTHANASIA OF ANIMALS**

Euthanasia may be defined as ‘painless killing to relieve suffering’. Veterinary surgeons should be aware that these events are often highly emotionally charged. In these circumstances, small actions and/or omissions can take on a disproportionate level of importance.

Euthanasia is not, in law, an act of veterinary surgery, and may be carried out by anyone provided that it is carried out humanely. No veterinary surgeon is obliged to kill a healthy animal unless required to do so under statutory powers as part of their conditions of employment.

Veterinary surgeons do, however, have the privilege of being able to relieve an animal's suffering in this way in appropriate cases. Generally, only veterinary surgeons acting under their direction Act, have access to the controlled drugs often used to carry out the euthanasia of animals.

The primary purpose of euthanasia is to relieve suffering. The decision to follow this option will be based on an assessment of many factors. These may include the extent and nature of the disease or injuries, other treatment options, the prognosis and potential quality of life after treatment, the availability and likelihood of success of treatment, the animal's age and/or other disease/health status and the ability of the owner to pay for private treatment.

#### **1. Difficulties with the decision**

Veterinary surgeons may face difficulties when an owner wants to have a perfectly healthy or treatable animal destroyed, or when an owner wishes to keep an animal alive in circumstances where euthanasia would be the kindest course of action.

The veterinary surgeon's primary obligation is to relieve the suffering of an animal, but account must be taken not only of the animal's condition, but also the owner's wishes and circumstances. To refuse an owner's request for euthanasia may add to the owner's distress and could be deleterious to the welfare of the animal. Where, in all conscience, a Veterinary surgeon cannot accede to a client's request for euthanasia, he should recognize the extreme sensitivity of the situation and make sympathetic efforts to direct the client to alternative sources of advice.

Where the reason for a request for euthanasia is the inability of the client to pay for private treatment, it may be appropriate to make known the options and eligibility for charitable assistance or referral for charitable treatment.

Where a veterinary surgeon is concerned about an owner's refusal to consent to euthanasia, Veterinary surgeons can only advise their clients and act in accordance with their professional judgment. Where a veterinary surgeon is concerned that an animal's welfare is compromised because of an owner's refusal to allow euthanasia, a Veterinary surgeon may take steps to resolve the situation, for example, an initial step could be to seek another Veterinary opinion for the client, potentially by telephone.



## **2. Euthanasia without the owner's consent**

The Animal Welfare Act or any other act does not provide that specifically authorize a veterinary surgeon to destroy an animal. Powers to destroy an animal, or arrange for its destruction, are conferred on an inspector (who may be appointed by the local authority) or a police constable. A veterinary surgeon may be asked to certify the condition of the animal is such that it should in its own interests be destroyed. An inspector or constable may act without a veterinary certificate if there is no reasonable alternative to destruction, and the need for action is such that it is not reasonably practical to wait for a veterinary surgeon.

A person with responsibility for an animal may commit an offence if an act, or failure to act, causes an animal to suffer unnecessarily. An owner is always responsible for their animal but a veterinary surgeon is likely to be responsible for the animal when it is an inpatient at the practice. If, in the opinion of the veterinary surgeon, the animal's condition is such that it should, in its own interests, be destroyed without delay, the veterinary surgeon may need to act without the owner's consent and should make a full record of all the circumstances supporting the decision in case of subsequent challenge. Generally, there should be discussions with the owner of the animal before such a decision, which should be endorsed by a veterinary surgeon not directly involved in the case until that time.

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