



THE COLLEGE OF
VETERINARIANS
OF ONTARIO

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE STANDARD

Humane Animal Handling and Restraint

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Introduction

Veterinarians are well recognized by the public (both organizations and individuals) as the experts and leaders in the humane care of animals. The public, and the profession, expect veterinarians to model responsible and appropriate animal handling and restraint in all circumstances. The public trusts veterinarians, and looks to the profession for compassionate care and welfare advice in all animal species.

The promotion and protection of animal health and welfare are encompassed in the fundamental commitments outlined in the Veterinary Oath¹, and are the foundation of the profession's ethos. The Oath, provided below, emphasizes elements inherent to a veterinarian's obligation in the responsible and humane animal handling and restraint:

"As a member of the veterinary medical profession, I solemnly swear that I will use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society.

I will strive **to promote animal health and welfare, prevent and relieve animal suffering**, protect the health of the public and the environment, and advance comparative medical knowledge.

¹ Canadian Veterinary Medical Association: The Canadian Veterinary Oath.
<http://www.canadianveterinarians.net/about-veterinary-medicine/oath.aspx>

I will perform my professional duties conscientiously, with dignity, and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I will strive continuously to improve my professional knowledge and competence and to maintain the highest professional and ethical standards for myself and the profession."

Often the challenge with the provision of veterinary care is the public's emotional reaction to methods of handling and restraint that are humane and necessary to ensure a safe outcome for all involved in the care of the animal. The method of humane handling and restraint of an animal by a veterinarian varies across species, and is influenced by a diverse number of factors and circumstances. Regardless of context, and in addition to the Veterinary Oath, a veterinarian should consider the Five Freedoms², first described by the Farm Animal Welfare Council of the UK as a contemporary and internationally accepted approach to the care and handling of all animals.

Definitions³

Handling: The manner of treating or dealing with an animal in order to interact with or control their actions. Handling, which requires knowledge of the normal behaviour of an animal, particularly an animal that may be stressed or fearful, can include physical contact, as well as auditory, visual and olfactory cues and may involve use of physical barriers (e.g. gates) to properly direct animal movement.

Restraint: The use of manual, mechanical, or pharmaceutical modalities to limit some or all of an animal's normal voluntary movement.

Practice Expectations

A veterinarian meets the Professional Practice Standard: Humane Animal Handling and Restraint when the veterinarian:

1. Understands and recognizes the normal behaviour and triggers for pain, fear, anxiety, aggression, and/or stress in a particular animal or species treated under their scope of practice.

² The Five Freedoms are outlined in Appendix A.

³ Definitions adapted from Position Statement on Companion Animal Handling and Restraint, British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

2. Seeks, understands and utilizes current, evidence-informed knowledge of responsible animal handling and/or restraint techniques, that are relevant to their scope of practice.
3. Utilizes techniques and/or equipment that prevent or minimize pain, fear, anxiety, aggression, and/or stress in an animal for the service provided.
4. Considers whether it is necessary to handle and/or restrain an animal for any interaction or procedure, and only utilizes the degree of handling and/or restraint directly proportional to the specific context.
5. Prioritizes the safety of the veterinarian, veterinary team, and other individuals present while supporting the physical and emotional health and wellbeing of the animal when selecting a method of handling and/or restraint for a specific circumstance.
6. Assesses and monitors an animal's capacity for pain, fear, anxiety, aggression, and/or stress through its behaviour, inclusive of its reaction to its environment (both physical and social), to ensure effective health and welfare outcomes.
7. Recognizes when an animal's state of arousal requires modification to the chosen approach and adjusts the approach, including plans for future encounters, accordingly. A plan for future encounters is recorded in the medical record and communicated to the veterinary team and the client.
8. Informs and educates an existing or a potential client about the humane handling of and/or restraint required for examination and/or treatment of a specific animal, as appropriate and necessary to ensure a positive animal health and welfare outcome.
9. Understands their own limitations and/or the limitations of the situation in the handling and restraint of an animal within the specific context and, where appropriate, defers care or refers an animal to another veterinarian and/or terminates a VCPR in accordance with College standards.

References

Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Informed Client Consent
Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship
Guide to the Professional Practice Standard: Veterinarian Client Patient Relationship
Position Statement: Pain Management

Suggested Resources

It is recognized that this source list is limited in its overarching advice to veterinarians. It is meant as a basic reference, acknowledging that this area is constantly evolving and developing.

World Organization for Animal Health – Animal Welfare at a Glance:

<http://www.oie.int/en/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-at-a-glance/>

Chapman, S: Safe Handling and Restraint of Animals: A Comprehensive Guide:

<https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Safe+Handling+and+Restraint+of+Animals%3A+A+Comprehensive+Guide-p-9781119077909>

Howell A, Feyrecilde M: Cooperative Veterinary Care:

<https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Cooperative+Veterinary+Care-p-9781119449737>

Lloyd, J: Minimizing Stress for Patients in the Veterinary Hospital: Why it's Important and What Can be Done about It:

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5606596/>

Yin S: Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behaviour Modification in Dogs and Cats: <https://lowstresshandling.com/>

Fear Free: <https://fearfreepets.com/>

Cat Friendly – How to Pet & Handle Cats:

<https://www.catvets.com/education/online/videos>

<https://www.catvets.com/education/online/webinars/feline-friendly-handling>

Grandin T: Temple Grandin's Guide to Working with Farm Animals:

<https://www.storey.com/books/temple-grandins-guide-working-farm-animals/>

National Farm Animal Care Council – Codes of Practice for the care and handling of farm animals: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice>

Beef Cattle: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/beef-cattle>

Bison: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/bison>

Chickens, Turkeys and Breeders: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/chickens-turkeys-and-breeders>

Dairy Cattle: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/dairy-cattle>

Equine: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/equine>

Farmed Deer: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/farmed-deer>

Farmed Fox: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/farmed-fox>

Farmed Mink: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/farmed-mink>

Goats: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/goats>

Pigs: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/pigs>

Poultry – Layers: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/poultry-layers>

Rabbits: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/rabbits>

Sheep: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/sheep>

Veal Cattle: <http://www.nfacc.ca/codes-of-practice/veal-cattle>

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website (www.cvo.org) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.

Appendix A⁴

Farm Animal Welfare Council - Five Freedoms

- 1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst** - by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.
- 2. Freedom from Discomfort** - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
- 3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease** - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- 4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour** - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
- 5. Freedom from Fear and Distress** - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

⁴ Five Freedoms sourced from the online archives of the Farm Animal Welfare Council. 2009.
<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121010012427/http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm>