

AAEP NEWS

Ethics: Alleviating ethical pressures faced by young practitioners

By Loni Taylor, DVM

A case recently addressed by the AAEP's Professional Conduct and Ethics Committee brought an emerging issue to light: the pressures to practice unethically that new equine veterinarians face daily.

In the case brought before the committee, the young veterinarian in question accepted advice from other veterinarians and long-term clients as "this is just the way it's done" and "those rules don't apply or are not enforced." As a direct result, this young veterinarian has faced huge legal battles to keep their veterinary license, paid numerous fines and lost some organization-specific licensure that required relocation.

In cases like this, it is easy to sit back and say "well that is uncalled for" or "they should have known better." Unfortunately, the lines are not always this crisp and pressures can occasionally overcome one's better judgment.

As a younger veterinarian who has spoken with colleagues and has personally experienced some of the scenarios mentioned, I can attest that the pressures are real and can often be difficult to address. In today's practice atmosphere, every client and every job opportunity may appear very important at the time. One must continue to remind oneself that although this particular job may seem big, nothing is big enough to lose one's license over or, even worse, compromise one's practice ethics so that a horse ends up dying because of it.

Unfortunately, younger veterinarians not only fight pressures to practice in the "gray zone" from clients but, sadly, face pressures to practice outside of the ethical lines from older veterinarians who are either in a mentor or a boss role. Many times these situations are even harder to deal with than client or trainer pressure.

It is a given that each of us needs to practice not only legally but ethically as well. The older, more experienced practitioner has an obligation to be a leader and a mentor to the younger, less experienced practitioner. If the younger practitioner cannot look to the more experienced veterinarian, then who are they going to obtain guidance from? Just because certain treatments or actions have been OK in the past does not mean they are OK now. Mentors need to be conscious of the situations

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Ultimately, a younger veterinarian must make a constant effort to practice ethically within the established guidelines and make sure they have a good handle of the specific rules of not only the state but the organization for which they work. This will ensure that the younger veterinarian will not unknowingly take bad advice from someone more experienced. That client or job for a less than ethical practice will seem much less important when they have lost their license and are no longer able to practice.

An older veterinarian must remember not to expect anyone under their employ or advice to practice in this manner. An older veterinarian's advice can directly impact a younger veterinarian's practice future, which is a significant responsibility that is often overlooked. We must all remember to do our best to represent this profession well and bring a good name to being an equine veterinarian.

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