

Crossing the line

By Kenton Morgan, DVM, DACT

We are all aware of the connotation of the phrase “crossing the line.” When we cross the line, we have broached some type of rule, regulation or social norm. An issue recently came before the Professional Conduct and Ethics Committee that quite literally, as well as figuratively, illustrates an example of crossing the line.

An AAEP member reported to the committee that several veterinarians were going into a neighboring state on an infrequent but regular basis and doing dental work, diagnosing and treating lameness, and providing other veterinary services. This occurs every day but, in this circumstance, the veterinarians were not licensed in the neighboring state. The veterinarians, all from Kentucky, were practicing without a license in West Virginia. (This is also an issue with some racetrack veterinarians from Pennsylvania and Maryland coming into West Virginia and working at the tracks despite not being licensed in West Virginia).



Presumably, this should be easily addressed by the West Virginia Board of Veterinary Medicine (WVBVM). The West Virginia practitioner inquired with the board whether these specific veterinarians were licensed in West Virginia—and they were not. Even after providing documentation that this was occurring, the board said they had no jurisdiction and couldn’t do anything about it. Furthermore, a representative of the board stated that they did not have the resources or interest from the attorney general’s office to pursue such infractions.

This was certainly a frustrating situation for the reporting veterinarian, who then contacted the Kentucky Board of

Veterinary Examiners and provided the same information regarding these individuals practicing in West Virginia without a license. The Kentucky board responded that they had no jurisdiction to act because this was occurring in another state.

Since this veterinarian is an AAEP member, the Professional Conduct and Ethics Committee was approached. Unfortunately, this member was unwilling to file a member-on-member complaint, the appropriate recourse for this type of accusation per our AAEP policy and procedures; rather, they preferred to address it with the offending veterinarians themselves. The veterinarian did not want to jeopardize referral services for their clients, since one of the offending veterinarians was from a large referral practice.

I bring this situation to our attention not to illustrate what appears to be a rather dysfunctional state regulatory office but to remind all of us that we can do better when it comes to crossing the line. Just because we don’t get caught or there do not appear to be consequences for an illegal act (practicing without a license) does not lessen our obligation to abide by the rules. Besides being an obvious violation of a state practice act, it also constitutes a blatant disregard of professional courtesy and respect for our colleagues.

As AAEP members, we have agreed to a standard of ethical practice that includes (but is not limited to): *understand and comply with the laws, regulations and standard of care of the appropriate jurisdiction.*

This example demonstrates a disregard by a few AAEP members for the regulations in West Virginia and demonstrates a lack of respect for their colleagues who are willing to abide by those same regulations. If we look at the foundations of professional ethics, particularly within veterinary medicine, one of the fundamental tenants of our ethical principles is to treat others the way we would want to be treated. In this instance, I don’t think any of us would want unlicensed practitioners coming into our state and practicing veterinary medicine.

Let’s do our best to not cross the line.

If you have an ethical question or issue to discuss, please join the Ethics Talk Rounds at communities.aaep.org/home. You can post your questions or comments anonymously.



ETHICAL PRACTICE
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