



Tierärztliche Vereinigung  
für **Tierschutz** e.V.



# Welfare and ethics in relation to equine veterinary medicine

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# Topics



- **Changes in the relationship between humans and horses**
- **Development of the „Ethics-Codex“**
- **The „Ethics-Codex for German Veterinarians“**
- **Examples in equine veterinary medicine**



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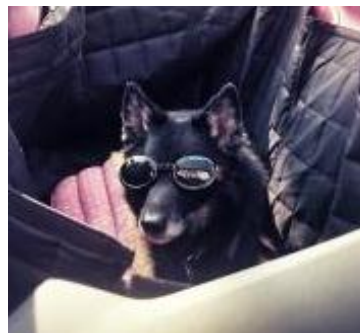
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# Change of the relationship humans : animals

- First humans (animals: hazard or prey)
- Domestication (dogs and horses vs. livestock)
- Religions (sacrifice animals, sacred animals, reincarnation)
- Horses: until recently „instruments“ for war, work and sports



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# Animal Welfare Movements



**J. Bentham (1789)** „...Principles of Morals and Legislation..“ footnote to justify the animal welfare in the utilitarianism (=belief that something is morally right if it benefits the majority of the people)

The question is not, Can they reason? nor Can they talk? but, *Can they suffer?*”

1824 Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

1837 first Societies für the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in Stuttgart and Dresden, Germany

**German Animal Welfare Act of 1934, adapted 1974 (amended 2016) and numerous legal directions and regulations**





# Animal Welfare is very controversial

- Is that unfortunate? No, not at all!
- It is a great success for humanity and society in terms of moral and ethics, if people can afford a growing empathy and care for animals (and practice this as well), even if they discuss about it....
- ...and...
- Open-minded pluralistic societies are and should be able to handle diversified opinions as long as they lead to constructive compromises which improve the public welfare





# Animal Welfare is very controversial

- Humans have a great responsibility for the life and welfare of animal they care for (our fellow-creatures, animals' dignity)
- The animal as dear companion and close friend is increasingly creating an idyllic image of the animal per se
- This increases the difficulty of a public discussion free of emotions, especially about using animals e.g. in food production and in sports such as riding competitions
- **This leads to various concepts on animal ethics**



# Development of the „Ethics-Codex“



- (Livestock-) Vets are not considered as the „driving force“ of animal welfare and not as individuals who are contacted for ethical issues
- The necessity has grown to encourage the veterinarian society to confirm a moral and ethical commitment above the legal minimum standards
- Resolution at the 26th symposium for vets in Bremen, Germany, to request the German Veterinary Association to compile an „Ethics-Codex“
- Working Group of the German Veterinary Association drafted the „Ethics-Codex“ which was approved through voting by a vast majority of the veterinarians of Germany on Oct 30th 2015 in Bamberg



# The „Ethics-Codex“

**The Ethics Codex recognizes the commitment of German veterinarians to both the inherent worth of animals and the profession's ethical responsibilities to the society as a whole in relation to the care of animals**



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# „Ethics-Codex“ – (1) Welfare of animals and health of society



## 1. As veterinarians, we will serve the greater good by...

- ✓ Pledging to **use our special knowledge and skills to protect and secure the health and wellbeing of animals**
- ✓ Representing the interests of animals in relation to the greater society, political decisions, economics, and science
- ✓ Seek to identify and search for solutions of problems relating to animal health and welfare
- ✓ **Dealing with competing interests and social objectives relating to animals**
- ✓ **Encouraging a responsible balance between conflicting points of view and goals, specifically taking into consideration the needs and interests of the animals**



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (1) Welfare of animals and health of society



## 1. As veterinarians, we will serve the greater good by...

- ✓ Working to protect humans against potential health risks due to animals and products of animal origin
- ✓ **Promoting scientific progress in all fields of medicine and biosciences**
- ✓ Supporting research, development and implementation of alternatives to experiments with animals
- ✓ Pledge to consider all aspects of sustainability in terms of ecological, economic, and social issues



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (2) human and animal health



## 2. We veterinarians accept our responsibility for our role in the health of animals and humans by...

- ✓ Pledging to comply with the “One-Health Concept” (prevent and control zoonoses, prevent resistance through responsible usage of antibiotics)
- ✓ **Using our veterinary knowledge and work skills**
  - ✓ **To protect animals against pain, damage, suffering and distress**
  - ✓ **To commit to the health and wellbeing of animals**
- ✓ **Helping to prevent, cure and mitigate animal disease**



# The „Ethics-Codex“ – (2) human and animal health



**2. We veterinarians accept our responsibility for our role in the health of animals and humans by...**

- ✓ **Avoiding performance-enhancing measures in animals**
  - ✓ **That exceed the animal's capacity to adapt, either physically or psychologically**
  - ✓ **Or that have unacceptable impacts on the animals' health or wellbeing**
- ✓ **Restricting any kind of animal breeding that causes or contributes to pain and suffering in animals**
- ✓ **Helping to recognize and to prevent genetic factors that can lead to animal suffering**
- ✓ **Promoting animal-friendly living-conditions for all animals in human care**
- ✓ **Supporting the continuous improvement of husbandry and caretaking**



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (3) medical treatment



- 3. We veterinarians will focus our medical treatment in committing to the animal's wellbeing by...**
- ✓ **Carrying out diagnostic, prophylactic and curative measures only in case of a medical indication or other reasonable cause**
  - ✓ **Orienting our veterinary-curative acts towards the restoration, maintenance or enhancement of the individual quality of the animal's life**
  - ✓ **Applying painful treatments to animals in principle only after general or local anesthesia and post-surgical analgesia has been provided**



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (3) medical treatment



## 3. We veterinarians will focus our medical treatment of animals on promoting the animal's wellbeing by...

- ✓ Providing medically appropriate first aid for ownerless and found animals within the available practical possibilities
- ✓ **Putting the animals' wellbeing above our personal professional ambitions**
- ✓ **If applicable, referring the patients to specialized practices or clinics when more advanced care is needed**
- ✓ **Euthanizing an animal only with strong justification using methods that are appropriately humane for the animal and circumstances**



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (4) support owners



4. We veterinarians support those who care for animals as they meet their responsibilities by...
- ✓ Informing them, whenever possible, prior to the purchase or acquisition of animals about the needs and interests of the chosen animals and about the potential consequences of the duty associated care for these animals
  - ✓ Promoting and contributing to the capacity of animal owners' and caretakers' for taking full responsibility for the wellbeing of their animals
  - ✓ Making sure that they have the special knowledge about the physiologic, psychologic and social needs of the animals in their care



# „Ethics-Codex“ – (4) support owners



4. We veterinarians support those who care for animals as they fulfill their responsibilities by...

- ✓ **Providing information and consultation to support the animal owners' and caretakers' capability to keep and care for their animals by considering the various species-, breed- and type-specific behavioral characteristics**
- ✓ **Encouraging that animal owners and caretakers improve the husbandry and/or care of animals** whenever we recognize deficiencies – if necessary in cooperation with the appropriate regulatory authorities





# „Ethics-Codex“ – (5) professional ethics



5. We veterinarians will comply with the rules of professional ethics by...

- ✓ **Continuously advancing our professional knowledge and expertise**
- ✓ Taking care of the professional development of both the starters of a veterinary profession as well as apprentices of animal care
- ✓ **Treating our employees with respect and compensate them appropriately for their work**
- ✓ **Serve as role models for our colleagues and newcomers with regard to our responsibility for ethical treatment of animals**



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## Recommendation for implementing the Codex of German Veterinarians who care for animals in Sports and Competitions



*The use of animals in competitions requires the defense of their needs in particular*

*Veterinary decisions should be solely taken in the animals' interest, pointing to all deficits and demanding their removal*

- ✓ Vets should advocate the exclusive use of animals chosen to attend a competition who are physically and mentally able to meet the demands
- ✓ They have to make the owners aware about the exposure of the animals to stress and the need to minimize the degree of potential stress
- ✓ Vets should discourage the presentation and awarding of animals whose physical traits impair their health or welfare status and may be inherited



## Recommendation for implementing the Codex of German Veterinarians who care for animals in Sports and Competitions



### Vets...

- ✓ Make sure that the qualified training of the animals for sport events and competitions is generally performed with positive reinforcement
- ✓ Decline the use of forced unnatural postures, as well as items and instruments which may be used to apply or enhance violence or force
- ✓ Condemn every use of doping and do not approve interventions, manipulations or medications to increase the performance, which negatively influence the animal health or welfare
- ✓ Inform the owners about the age-appropriate handling of animals
- ✓ Ensure that injured or sickend animals are only used in sports after a sufficient time of recovery



## Recommendation for implementing the Codex of German Veterinarians who care for animals in Sports and Competitions



### Vets...

- ✓ **Monitor specific reasons of stress during sport events and urge the minimization of these factors**
- ✓ **Take care that the animals have an adequate resting time before and in-between the contests**
- ✓ **Advocate that animals for which there is no further usage for the intended purpose are housed and cared for according to good practice**
- ✓ **Demand that this phase of the animals' life is financially secured through informing the owners early about this need**





# Examples in equine veterinary medicine

- **Neurectomy of the Rami palmares**
  - **Indication: chronic pain due to disease of the extremity**
  - **Transsection of the sensory nerv w/o impairment of the motor function – by this the horse will be able to walk w/o pain**
  - **However – after recovery the neurectomy is not comprehensible and vets at the contest will not know about it**
- **According to the regularity concerning performance test of the FN, the use of a horses with a neurectomy is not allowed due to potential development of pain, suffering or harm**
- **Suggestion**
  - **Identification of horses with neurectomy via a chip or a clamp which could be identified via x-ray to ensure these horses are not used for eventing**





# Examples in equine veterinary medicine

- Vets should consult, inform and encourage the owners about housing which conform to the species specific needs
- In Germany the Federal Ministry for food and agriculture has developed guidelines for the housing of horses
  - According to these the housing should, amongst others
    - Enable social contact between horses by at least visual, hearing and olfactory contact
    - Enable sufficient free movement which does not include riding or other controlled movement (e.g. in a horse walker)



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# Examples in equine veterinary medicine

- Vets at competitions should control the animal-welfare conformity of instruments such as bridles, bits and other items
- Discouraged should be...
  - Nosebands which are too tight
  - The use of bars with shanks in combination with non-bit-bridles (hackamore) with lever
  - The use of martingales which are too short and provoke tension on the bit whilst jumping without influence of the rider
  - ... The use of young horses which are not full grown





# Examples in equine veterinary medicine

## Euthanasia

„Ethic Codex“ (3) medical treatment

“euthanizing an animal only with strong justification using methods that are appropriately humane for the animal and circumstances”

- This means euthanasia only with strong justification (for example: if the further living of the animal is only possible with a limitation in animal welfare)
  - Due to a veterinary indication
  - Not if the euthanasia is solely the owners will (e.g. due to limitation of the use in sports)





# Conclusion



The German veterinary society has proven with its „Ethic-Codex“ that German veterinarians commit themselves to

- act ethically correct in all areas of their profession
- that they see themselves as a profession that serves the general public, particularly concerning animal welfare, also beyond money making

It created a document which makes it possible to realize and verify this commitment in the different aspects of veterinary medicine...



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# Thank you! Q & A



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