Survey of veterinary student attitudes toward animal welfare and pain

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Introduction

Discrepancies in the background and training of veterinarians regarding the painfulness of procedures across species may impact their decision to use analgesia. The objective of this study was to investigate veterinary student attitudes toward pain and animal welfare.

Materials and Methods

An electronic survey instrument was developed to assess demographic information, perceptions of animal welfare, concern with specific animal welfare issues, and estimation of pain scores on a scale of 1-10 for certain procedures and conditions. A subset of 131 responses from veterinary students were analyzed from an ongoing study involving 14 colleges of veterinary medicine in the U.S. and Canada.

Results

Results suggest that females believed more strongly that an animal welfare and ethics course should be part of the veterinary curriculum than males (P = 0.03).

Respondent preparedness to discuss certain welfare topics differed based on background (farm/ranch, rural or urban community) (P ≤ 0.03) and year of veterinary school (P ≤ 0.02). Respondent willingness to administer pain management also differed by background (P = 0.04). Whether respondents had observed a veterinarian in practice properly administer pain medication to a food animal also differed by area of interest, background, and year in veterinary school (P ≤ 0.03). Assigned pain scores for bovine dystocia, bovine acute metritis, canine tail docking and porcine castration also differed by background (P ≤ 0.03).

Significance

These data show that gender, background and the year of veterinary school should be considered when developing and standardizing the delivery of animal welfare topics across the veterinary curriculum.