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GUIDE TO PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Issued by

MALAYSIAN VETERINARY COUNCIL

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INTRODUCTION

The Veterinary Surgeons Act, 1974 states that the Malaysian Veterinary Council has disciplinary jurisdiction over all veterinary surgeons registered under the Act (Part IV, article 29). The Act also states that the Council is empowered to make regulations in order to carry out the objectives and purposes of the Act (Part IV, article 39). Pursuant to the above, the Malaysian Veterinary Council has now drawn up a Code of Ethics and Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons in the country.

This guide is necessarily of a general nature and matters not specified here, in certain circumstances, might be deemed to be professional misconduct. The advice of the Council should always be sought as to the propriety of one's action in particular situations and the Council is very willing to help in these cases.

Every veterinary surgeon is under an obligation to maintain the honour and dignity of the veterinary profession. He or she has an obligation to fellow veterinary surgeons and to the Malaysian Veterinary Council which is the sole regulatory body for the profession.

A veterinary surgeon is granted a particular status and certain exclusive privileges under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1974. Consequently his or her conduct must be measured by a high and strict standard of ethics. A profession is judged by the conduct of its individual members and any act of misconduct by one affects the whole body.

The Council is under a statutory obligation to control members of the profession and upon registration, each new member is required to take the Ikrar Veterinarwan (the Veterinarian's Oath). It is the duty of every registered person both to bring to the notice of the Registrar of the Veterinary Surgeons, conduct which might bring the profession into disrepute, and to be prepared to furnish evidence of such conduct.

Members of the public have the right to notify the Council of any alleged breach of conduct with respect to veterinary matters and the Council shall undertake to investigate the allegation.

1 General Obligations of Veterinary Surgeons

Veterinary surgeons on registration with the Veterinary Council give a solemn undertaking to take good care of all animals entrusted to their care. They should, therefore, never refuse to attend to an animal nor should they cease attendance on an animal without a good cause.

By virtue of their training, veterinary surgeons are held to be skilled persons and are under a particular obligation to make full and careful use of their knowledge and skill.

2 Certification

Veterinary surgeons may be required to give certificates, notifications, etc. signed by them in their professional capacity. It is a grave offence if a veterinary surgeon issues any certificate which is untrue, misleading or improper, or which is given in respect of any matter not having received his/her personal attention. A veterinary surgeon must be careful not to sign a certificate written in a language which he/she does not properly understand.

Certificates must be properly executed, bearing the name and address of the veterinary surgeon and proper identification of the animal concerned, and must also include the date of examination.

A veterinary surgeon must not sign a certificate if he/she is unsure of any of its contents. It is well to remember that every document which a veterinary surgeon signs may be used as evidence against him/her.

In no case should a certificate be signed which covers a future event. A veterinary surgeon must be careful not to allow certification to be influenced by other persons.

Where a veterinary surgeon is required to certify general disease free status in animals or in an area, the relevant facts, should be ascertained from the Government Services prior to certification.

The extent of the examination which has been carried out should be noted on any certificate of health or soundness, i.e. whether the examination was confined to a clinical examination or supported by laboratory or other tests.

Certificates should be furnished on notepaper with a printed heading or on a printed form.

3 Publicity and Advertising

The Veterinary Council recognises the necessity of informing the general public of the veterinary services available to them in an area or district. In furnishing such information, the individual veterinary surgeon should be careful to comply with the guidelines contained herein.

4 Setting up Practice

When a member is setting up a practice he/she should inform all existing practitioners in the district.

It is permissible to insert a notice announcing the setting up of a practice in the press. All announcements should be through a registered Veterinary Association only and they should be presented in a dignified and professional manner. The announcement should be limited to the following information:

- (i) The name and address of the veterinary surgeon with the abbreviation of the degrees or diplomas which are entered in the Register of Veterinary Surgeons, with the title "Veterinary Surgeon" or Veterinarian, the date of commencement of practice and the telephone number. It may include details on the hours of attendance of the practice.
- (ii) The announcement should appear in the "Personal" column or under the heading "Professional" of the national dailies and local papers, and should not be more than one column width. Insertions should be limited to two consecutive issues.

Example of Press Notice:

Dr Ali Puteh, Veterinary Surgeon, will
commence (has commenced) practice
1 st April, 1977 at 30 Blank Street,
Petaling Jaya, Telephone 123.

5 Change of Practice Address

Where a practice address is changed, or where practices join together in partnership or where ownership of a practice changes hands, it is possible to send a circular closed letter to all bona fide clients of the practice informing them of such changes.

It is also permissible to insert a notice in two consecutive issues of the national and local press similar in format and content to that approved

when setting up practice, with the additional information regarding partnership, change of address, or ownership.

6 Location of Professional Premises

Care should be taken to ensure that premises or locations used for practice purposes are such as to enhance the dignity of the profession.

7 Clinics and Surgeries

The clinics or surgeries should have adequate space and lighting and facilities for the proper practice of the profession. Utmost attention should be given to the hygiene and appearance of the premises befitting the profession.

8. Plates and Signs

A sign be may be placed as to indicate to the public the existence and location of a surgery. This sign may be illuminated by a fixed light and may obtain the following words only:

Klinik Veterinar (Veterinary Clinic)

Klinik Haiwan (Animal Clinic)

Hospital Veterinar (Veterinary Hospital)

Hospital Haiwan (Animal Hospital)

The lettering should not exceed 38cm (15 inches) in height an, not more than two colours for the background and the lettering be used. A directional arrow may also be used to indicate the location of a surgery.

A plate indicating the name and qualification of the practising veterinary surgeon may be mounted on the front elevation of the practice. Such plate should contain no information other than the name, letters indicating a professional degree or diploma as entered in the Register, the title "Veterinary Surgeon", the hours of attendance and the telephone number. The lettering on a plate should not exceed 7.6cm (3 inches) in height.

Where a practice covers a wide area, it may have one or more branch surgeries. A plate may be placed on a branch surgery, which should contain the address or telephone number of the main surgery, subject to the provision that the veterinary surgeon attends the branch surgery at regular stated times at least once a week.

A sign must not be fixed at a place of call at which attendances are irregular or indefinite. Drawing of animals on the sign or wall of the practice is highly unethical.

9. Advertising

Advertising or causing or permitting other persons to advertise on behalf of a veterinary surgeon, whether by paid advertisement, or by editorial or other notice in the public press, or by distributing or causing or permitting to be distributed circulars, books or cards relating to professional attainments or abilities or chargers (or in respect of medicines or appliances prepared or sold by veterinary surgeons) is unethical.

To furnish a notice or an interview to a newspaper, or to inspire an article referring to professional attainments for the purpose of extending a practice, or to issue circulars or exhibit cards in public places, or to canvass for work not only by directly asking for work, but by handing cards bearing name, qualification and address, to possible clients are all forms of direct advertising, and as such are unethical.

A veterinary surgeon should also be careful to guard against indirect advertising, i.e. to see that other persons do not advertise for him/her. The onus of proving that what appears to be an advertisement published without knowledge or consent rests on the veterinary surgeon concerned.

A practitioner should not use on plates or stationery such titles as Consultant, Specialist, Canine or Feline Surgeon, or any similar title or description, or offer services such as operations, electrical treatment, radiography, boarding of animals, stripping of dogs, etc. It is also unprofessional to set out any appointment held from a State department, local authority, race committee, show committee, etc. If a veterinary surgeon is connected with a business, the letters D.V.M., M.R.C.V.S., or other letters indicating a veterinary qualification, or the title veterinary surgeon should not appear with his/her name in

connection with any advertisement, notice or report concerning such business or agency.

It is unethical to allow any boarding kennel, shop or agency to be advertised with the practitioner's professional address, or the address of the place of residence.

10 **Professional Stationery, Labels, etc.**

Professional stationery should not be of conspicuous colour and the printing should not be in large letters. It should contain only the name of the practitioner (or the names in case of partnership), letters indicating diplomas or degrees entered in the register, the title veterinary surgeon, telegraphic address, telephone number and the hours of attendance. No mention of ancillary services such as radiography, boarding of animals, stripping of dogs, etc. should be made. The use of a title, such as "Consultant", or "Canine or Feline Specialist" is unethical. There should be no indication of the fact that the member holds a part-time appointment.

Labels on medicines or other veterinary supplies should exhibit no printed matter other than the name, title, address and telephone number of the practitioner and the hours of attendance in small type, together with any necessary directions for use, and the heading "For Animal Treatment Only"

11. **Directories**

A local or classified directory or the yellow pages may publish, among others, free or for a fee, the names of veterinary surgeons practising within an area; where all veterinary surgeons practising within the area are given the option of having their names included, this is unobjectionable. If, in such a case, special prominence is given to one practitioner over another or where a directory contains only the names of selected practitioners or when the print are in bold, heavy and specially attractive type, then the inclusion by a practitioner of his/her name in such a directory comes within the definition of advertising. It is unethical for a veterinary surgeon to allow his/her name to get any special prominence, to be selectively included or to be printed in bold, heavy and specially attractive type in any directory.

12 **The Press and Publications**

As already pointed out, it is unethical for any veterinary surgeon in private practice to seek publicity in any manner or by any means in the lay press. It is equally unethical to permit another person to publish an article in the lay press that would bring the veterinary surgeon's name before the public in a manner that could be deemed to advertise his/her professional qualifications or attainments.

A veterinary surgeon may, however, contribute articles to the lay press on veterinary matter of public importance, provided that:

- (a) the circumstances indicate that the article was not inspired by a desire to promote the veterinary surgeon's own personal advancement;
- (b) the article is not detrimental to the interests of the profession;
- (c) the veterinary surgeon's name only appears in connection with the article without any letters indicating a professional qualification, but the title veterinary surgeon may be used;
- (d) a photograph of the writer is not included with the article.

13 **Canvassing or Touting for Practice**

Canvassing or touting for practice or state work by a veterinary surgeon is unethical. To solicit practice by the distribution of cards, or other literature, is also unethical. It is equally unethical for a member to allow another person to canvass for him/her or to make use of the occasion of an official visit as an inspector to acquire a client.

A veterinary surgeon should not canvass for an appointment, even a temporary appointment held by another practitioner. Acceptance of a professional post as advertised as "open to tender" is also unethical. It is not in the public interest, nor in the interest of the profession, that tendering should be permitted. A veterinary surgeon may, of course, apply for an appointment that is vacant, provided it is not "open to tender".

14 **Assistants**

Practitioners when **advertising** for an assistant should give a telephone number or box number, but not their name or address. Salary or conditions offered should not be stated in the lay press.

15. **Covering**

The term "covering" applies to permission by a veterinary surgeon for his/her name to be used by an unregistered or an unqualified person. This practice, apart from being unethical, would be regarded as conduct disgraceful in a professional respect.

A veterinary surgeon may employ veterinary nurses, dispensers, grooms or other lay help, but any such person shall not be permitted either to diagnose disease or to give any surgical or medical treatment to an animal, except that which is prescribed by the practitioner, and the public must never be led to assume that such a person is a qualified veterinary surgeon. It is to be understood that the purpose for which a veterinary student serves a pupilage is to enable him/her see practice. A student must not be employed as a qualified assistant or as a locum tenens.

16 **Meeting an Unqualified Person in Consultation**

By this is meant the meeting, for the purpose of consultation with a view to arriving at a clinical diagnosis, with an unqualified person. Such a consultation is unethical and can be construed as conduct disgraceful in a professional respect in that it will render nugatory the provisions of Section 34 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1974. It will also be misleading to members of the public in that it can lead them to believe that an unqualified person is, in fact, a registered veterinary surgeon.

The prohibition on meeting an unqualified person in consultation is not meant to include the consultation a practising veterinary surgeon should properly have with experts in specific scientific disciplines such as soil science, nutrition, etc.

17. **Proprietary Preparations, Patent Medicines, Animal Foods or Appliances**

The issue of a certificate recommending such products is advertising and such a practice is unethical.

18 **Professional Relationships**

The relationship of members of the profession with one another should be of a high standard and ethical considerations should always be borne in mind. This applies not only in relationships between members in practice, but also in relationship between members from different sectors of the profession.

Where a complaint is received by a commercial firm about its product, it is proper for a veterinary surgeon employed by such a firm to visit the farm or premises from which the complaint arises to investigate the complaint. Before doing so the veterinary surgeon should first notify and, if possible, consult the veterinary surgeon normally employed by the owner.

In order to minimise or reduce the possibility of disputes occurring between veterinary surgeons, it is advisable that written agreements be prepared before Principal/Assistant relationships or professional partnerships are entered into.

19 **Consultation**

A consultant is a veterinary surgeon who, at an invitation of a veterinary surgeon in attendance on an animal co-operates either by a meeting, or by correspondence, in the diagnosis, prognosis or treatment of such animal's condition. Consultations take place either at the suggestion of the practitioner or the wish of the owner of the animal. In either case arrangements for the consultation should be made by the practitioner in attendance.

A consultant should attend only with the consent of the practitioner and should not, except in the case of emergency, see the patient or meet the client professionally until the practitioner in attendance has arrived. Only in the event of the non-attendance of the practitioner in charge should the Consultant see the case on his/her own and in such event should report thereon as soon as practicable to the Practitioner in charge.

A practitioner should not decline to call in another member of the profession when so requested by the client.

The position of the Consultant requires discretion and strict observance of professional ethics.

20 **Supersession**

If a veterinary surgeon is called upon by an owner or agent to see a sick' or injured animal which is or has been recently in the care of another practitioner, he/she should decline to attend, except as a consultant, unless the first practitioner has retired from the case, or has been informed that his/her services are no longer required. The veterinary surgeon called should always inform the practitioner who is being superseded.

21 **Public Lectures, Demonstrations, etc. given by Veterinary Surgeons**

It is desirable that members of the profession should give lectures and addresses of educational value on veterinary topics to farming audiences or to other interested groups. When members intend to give a lecture or demonstration of a veterinary nature to, a lay group, they are recommended, as a matter of courtesy, to inform, in the first place, through the local veterinary organisations, the veterinary surgeons practising in the area where the proposed lecture or demonstration is to be given. They must also be aware of their individual responsibility to see that their conduct under these circumstances is always such as will enhance the dignity and status of the profession, and that they do not abuse their position to acquire publicity for their own practice.

22 **Radio and Television**

As in the case of public lectures and demonstrations given by veterinary surgeons, the same objective approach should be adopted with regard to radio and television appearances. Anonymity is not necessary, but particular care should be taken, in advance, by the veterinary surgeon to ensure that the programme introducer or the chairman does not transgress the ethical code by giving undue prominence or publicity to the veterinary surgeon taking part.

23. **Professional Attendance at Race Meetings, Shows, Gymkhanas, etc.**

When a veterinary surgeon undertakes to act as a veterinary surgeon to a show, race meeting, gymkhana, etc. it is his/her obligation to ensure that adequate equipment such as suitable humane killer, drugs, bandages etc. are available. It should not be assumed that the organisers will make such equipment available. Failure to carry out adequately the duties required, such as putting down a horse, because of lack of suitable equipment could well be construed as conduct disgraceful in a professional respect, and could, therefore, be answerable to Council as a disciplinary offence.

24 Insurance Examination

When a veterinary surgeon is asked by an Insurance Company to examine on its behalf a case already under treatment, the name of the practitioner in attendance should first be ascertained and adequate notice be given of the date and time when it is proposed to make the examination.

25 After Effects of Drugs

Veterinary surgeons are reminded of their obligation of ensuring that they are fully informed on the excretion times of drugs used by them, and that they advise their clients accordingly. This obligation applies equally in the ease or residues in the tissues of food animals, of racing animals and of show animals.

Any drug or substance which may affect the courage, speed or stamina of an animal is considered to be a dope. The administrations of such substances for these purposes constitute doping. Veterinary surgeons should not be associated in any way with such practices which undoubtedly would bring disgrace to the profession.

The Stewards and/or Committee should be notified of the administration of any substances to an animal before and during competition.

26. Locum Tenens and Managers

It is the duty of a locum tenens and/or the manager of a practice to exercise the same care and attention in the practice as would be exercised if the practice were the person's own.

27. Collective Responsibility

As all veterinary surgeons are under a declared obligation to maintain the interests, honour and dignity of the profession, it is the duty of every member to report to Council any breach of the Veterinary Surgeon Act which may come to their notice, whether the offender be a veterinary surgeon or a lay person.

28. Offences Against the Law

In order that a proper standard of conduct shall be maintained, the Veterinary Council is empowered under the Act to punish any action on the part of a registered veterinary surgeon that could be interpreted as being "conduct disgraceful to him in a professional respect" - (Section 29 of the Veterinary Surgeon Act 1974). The penalties which the Council may impose consist of suspension for a prescribed period, or erasure of the name of the veterinary surgeon from the Register, thereby rendering it impossible for the person concerned to practice as a veterinary surgeon. In addition, the Act empowers the Council to erase from the Register the name of a person convicted in the State of treason, or felony, or of a misdemeanour or, if convicted outside the State, of a crime of offence which if committed in the State would be felony or a misdemeanour.

IKRAR VETERINAWAN (THE VETERINARIAN'S OATH)

I,on this
day do solemnly pledge to uphold
the dignity and honour of the Veterinary Profession and will
faithfully observe the code of ethics and conduct as drawn
up by the Malaysian Veterinary Council.

.....
Signature

In the presence of the Registrar of the Malaysian Veterinary
Council

.....
Registrar