Ethical Dilemmas in Practice: How Frequent & How Stressful?

In this study, veterinarians were asked how frequently they face ethical dilemmas and to rate their stress level in 3 common scenarios: (1) convenience euthanasia of a healthy animal; (2) client financial limitations restricting treatment; and (3) a client wishing to continue treatment despite compromised animal welfare or quality of life. The majority (57%) reported facing 1–2 such dilemmas per week; 34% reported 3–5. All 3 scenarios were rated “highly stressful,” with female veterinarians giving 2 scenarios (ie, convenience euthanasia, client wishing to continue treatment) significantly higher stress ratings than male veterinarians. Stress ratings were not influenced by number of years in practice (range, 1–25 years), suggesting that all veterinarians regularly face stressful ethical dilemmas.

Myths of Leadership

This study tested the hypothesis that women are underrepresented in managerial positions because they receive unfavorable evaluations if they adopt male-stereotypical leadership styles. Undergraduate students (n = 136) were asked to evaluate different leadership styles involving a female and a male leader. Regardless of gender, leaders who adopted stereotypically feminine leadership styles (eg, democratic, relationship-oriented) rather than being autocratic and task-oriented were considered more competent and efficient and were evaluated more favorably. This has implications for a greater role for women in top management positions.

Once again, we see a paradox of veterinary education: First as students and then through CE, veterinarians are regularly instructed about gold standards for patient care and treatment protocols, but they are not trained for situations where the wheels come off—for example, when client finances cannot stretch even to the bronze standard. The researchers made a strong case for postgraduate training in ethical and decision-making skills because many veterinarians entered the profession before such teaching was widely available.


COMMENTARY

This study is of interest despite reservations about labeling leadership styles as stereotypically “female” or “male” (most of us have met democratic male and autocratic female leaders). A good leader is generally considered someone who takes charge and makes strong decisions, but what emerges from this study is that the relationship-centered leadership approach—listening, cooperating, helping develop strengths—also belongs in the ward or the boardroom. For more, see Drew Dudley’s “Leading with Lollipops” (http://bit.ly/dgtwcd).

COMMENTARY

SOURCE: My Veterinary Career

Visit myveterinarycareer.com or call 877-963-4488 to get started finding quality, “custom fit” veterinary professionals for your practice today.

©2013 AAHA