Animal Welfare in Veterinary Practice is a practical guide to help veterinarians improve the welfare of their patients in their everyday work. A concise and accessible introduction to welfare that is both interesting and valuable in practice.

The book describes ways to evaluate patients, develop in-practice quality-of-life assessments, resolve difficult clinical dilemmas, and turn good decisions into real welfare outcomes. It reviews available scientific information, legal issues and ethical dilemmas, and relates these to everyday case studies throughout. It provides ways for all veterinary professionals to develop their animal welfare understanding, without assuming prior knowledge, while advancing the wisdom and abilities of experienced practitioners.

Key features
• Presents practical and realistic methods for working with owners to improve patients’ welfare within the constraints of everyday practice.
• Provides useful advice for work within many legal jurisdictions.
• Includes summaries of research, vital references and further reading sources.
• Key points are recapped at the end of each chapter.

Suitable for all those working in the veterinary and related professions, including veterinarians, veterinary nurses, animal welfare scientists, animal behaviourists, paraprofessionals and lay staff.

About the author
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Animal Welfare in Veterinary Practice
The Universities Federation for Animal Welfare

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Sir Peter Medawar CBE FRS, 8th May 1957
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‘The veterinary profession is the ultimate arbiter and protector of animal welfare’. This is a mantra I’ve heard many times, usually from the mouths of veterinary surgeons. Is this an objective statement of fact or a means of professional self-protection? It’s certainly a laudable aspirational goal; but do veterinary practitioners work to fulfil it, or do they merely hold on to it to displace the disappointment of everyday reality that animal keepers inevitably hold the balance of power reducing the influential scope of the individual vet and the wider profession?

The UK’s Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons 2012 Code of Professional Conduct includes the following declaration made by all veterinary surgeons as a condition of admission: ‘I PROMISE AND SOLEMNLY DECLARE that I will pursue the work of my profession with integrity and accept my responsibilities to the public, my clients, the profession and the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, and that, ABOVE ALL, my constant endeavour will be to ensure the health and welfare of animals committed to my care’. The upper case letters are not my addition; ‘ABOVE ALL’, UK veterinary surgeons must work to ensure animal health and welfare, a standard that fits well with the aspiration described above. Many other countries have oaths for their veterinary surgeons similarly stating the importance of animal welfare, so that this should be the case seems not to be in contention. The question remains – what does the profession actually do to achieve it?

That the veterinary profession lost ground in the advancement of animal welfare science over a number of years is beyond doubt. At practitioner level, concentrating on the immediacy of ill-health as the prime indicator of good or bad welfare could almost be viewed as the course of least resistance and it is easy to see how the profession fell into this trap while science moved on around it. Good or bad animal health is undoubtedly an indicator of good or bad animal welfare, but assessing animal welfare is so much more than merely benchmarking animal health. This failing has thankfully been recognised and there is much work going on to redress the balance.
To achieve real improvements in animal welfare, veterinary practitioners need appropriate tools to influence the behaviour of animal keepers. These are not simply those of recognition, diagnosis and measurement familiar to those in practice, they also include objective and productive methods of assessment, reflection and communication techniques that have been less commonly adopted. This book describes the concept of a ‘welfare account’ where each veterinary surgeon (and indeed the veterinary profession collectively and each client/animal keeper) should manage their account with deposits and withdrawals in a similar way to a monetary bank account, aiming to remain in credit and avoid being overdrawn with negative welfare outcomes by adapting old tools and adopting new ones. It points practitioners in a direction to deliver the RCVS oath, noting pragmatically that ‘Practitioners should not be ashamed of the fact that they make money, enjoy their job, learn from their previous cases, maintain good public relations and have not been sued, when these are achieved as a side effect of welfare-focused veterinary work’. A welcome recognition of the place in which practitioners find themselves in what they would describe as the real world.

I first met James Yeates when he attended a British Veterinary Association: Animal Welfare Foundation course for final year undergraduate veterinary students in 2003, aimed at addressing everyday animal welfare challenges that occur in first opinion practice and achieving positive outcomes. His contributions to discussion were expansive, well thought through and stimulatory in a way I had not seen in delegates at this course before or since. In this book it is encouraging to see that this refreshing and challenging approach has been further developed.

When attempting to act as the final arbiter and guardian of animal welfare, practitioners should reflect on what they do in their every day working life that achieves that aim. This book provides tools to realise the aspiration.

Carl Padgett, BVMS, CertCHP, MRCVS
Foreword

Fresh-faced, enthusiastic but naive veterinary students often passionately believe that they can make a difference and improve welfare of animals committed to their care. Thankfully, provided we equip students with the necessary knowledge base and skills, then during their professional career they can make a positive impact on the lives of their patients and their patients’ owners. This positive influence and the generally high esteem placed on the profession by the general public ensure the professional life of a veterinary surgeon is still hugely rewarding.

However, scratch beneath the surface and many veterinary surgeons are frustrated by their lack of ability to persuade owners to do the right thing for their animals. The simple truth is that owners usually retain the day to day responsibility for the care of their animals. Therefore, often the veterinary surgeon’s ability to improve welfare depends more on their ability to influence client behaviour than on any clinical knowledge. Whilst waiting for Utopia, we probably ought to also recognise that not everybody is working towards the same common goals. Concern for animal welfare has to compete with other values ranging from the rational, such as the sustainability of our rural communities, to the irrational, such as the aesthetic considerations of the show ring.

This book takes a very positive and pragmatic approach to this challenge. The overriding theme is ‘how can the veterinary profession promote better animal welfare’? Somebody not familiar with the veterinary profession would perhaps wonder how a whole book can be dedicated to this topic. Surely that is fundamental to what veterinary surgeons do every day? The critical proposition raised by this book is that the veterinary profession should review how it can deliver on this assumed animal advocate role. Society expects the profession to promote the interests of animals. What does that actually mean in practice?

Refreshingly James Yeates does not dwell on the academic debate over welfare definitions, rather he refers to the ‘vague’ concern for animals’ interests. He does, however, move the debate forward on several different counts including welfare
assessment, consideration of owners’ interests, and the potential relationships between owners and veterinary professionals.

In Chapter 2, James states that owners are part of the problem as well as part of the solution. I have also heard it stated that the veterinary profession is also part of the problem as well as the solution. During discussions of contentious animal welfare issues, I have often felt that veterinary surgeons are all too willing to take on the devil’s advocate position. It sometimes seems easier to represent the views of their most sceptical client rather than try to promote a more pro-active welfare-focused view. This book tackles these issues head on and attempts to provide solutions. It should be read widely within the profession and should stimulate further reflection and discussion upon the profession’s assumed role as an animal advocate.

David Main, BVetMed, PhD, CertVR, DWEL, DipECAWBM (AWSEL), MRCVS
Veterinary professionals are concerned about animal welfare and want to make a difference. This concern for animals is why most of us joined, stay in and enjoy the profession. There is an enormous potential to improve animals’ welfare using the knowledge, enthusiasm, intelligence and compassion of the veterinary professionals. This is a global opportunity, although the statuses of animals and the veterinary professions differ between countries and areas. This potential has begun to be increasingly captured and developed, and there are many more opportunities that we can fulfil as the profession develops its role in animal welfare in all societies. Many other people are doing very many things. This book hopes to contribute to, stimulate and assist with realising these opportunities.

At the same time, concern for animals is why many people dislike practice or leave the profession. Some of the most intelligent, caring and concerned people stop helping animals, precisely because they are concerned about animals. This attrition may be due to those veterinary professionals who decide to specialise in animal welfare become animal welfare scientists. Or it may be due to the frustration borne of the seeming endlessness of welfare problems, with each day bringing more of the same problems despite the work of the day before.

Veterinary professionals need tools to deal with obstacles such as financial limitations, lack of time, clients’ resistance and owners’ non-compliance. So this book aims at providing practical and realistic methods for working with owners to improve patients’ welfare, within the realistic constraints of everyday practice. Veterinary professionals also need to work within the law so, while nothing in this book should be taken as legal guidance, it tries to provide advice that is useful for work within many jurisdictions. The book also tries to be realistic about what busy veterinary professionals can read, by summarising other research, including only vital references, providing further reading sources and recapping key points at the end of each chapter. Where there are easy and proven answers, they are given. Where there are not easy options, the book gives new ideas and general advice to help each veterinary professional to make their personal decision about their own cases.
Veterinary professionals have to deal with welfare issues in ways that they feel are well-informed, well-reasoned and well-intentioned. So this book provides ways for veterinary professionals to develop their animal welfare understanding, but without them having to become animal welfare research scientists. Science is (as we shall see) vitally important, but veterinary professionals need to be especially aware of the aspects that are important for practice, without trying to recreate the excellent animal welfare literature that already exists. Conversely, I have tried to explain or contextualise the veterinary terms for non-veterinary readers.

Veterinary professionals also want to engage with the bigger picture. So this book also addresses ways in which veterinary professionals can easily, feasibly and realistically contribute to improving animal welfare on a wider scale, through personal efforts and professional bodies. Veterinary professionals can get the best of both worlds by helping both individual patients and making overall progress.

These ideas come from academic research, personal experience and a lot of discussions. As such, I hope it is a contribution to and from all veterinary professionals. I have tended to use we and our to incorporate all colleagues who work with or within veterinary practice: veterinary surgeons, nurses, scientists, behaviourists, paraprofessionals and lay staff.

The book begins by considering our relationship with our animal patients (Chapter 1), before moving on to consider the other main stakeholders, our clients (Chapter 2). With the main groundwork set out, the chapters can move through the process modelled on how clinical decisions can be made and effected, through animal welfare assessment (Chapter 3), choosing a treatment option (Chapter 4) and achieving the desired goals (Chapter 5). These ideas can then be applied to other animals, people and issues (Chapter 6). Each chapter provides a framework for people to read while considering their own circumstances and concerns.

By no means is this book the work of the sole author. Many people, from many countries, have contributed ideas. Especial thanks to international students, co-lecturers and delegates at undergraduate and postgraduate courses, conferences and seminars around the world, teaching whom has helped me to refine many of the ideas in this book. I would also like to thank those who have discussed drafts of this book. Thanks to practitioners (who mainly advised to make it shorter and include fewer references), especially Nicola Ackerman, Lucy Hamblin, Myfanwy Hill, Richard Hillman, Iain Richards and members of the BVA Ethics and Welfare Group and Council, BSAVA Scientific Committee and SPVS Council. Thanks to animal welfare scientists (who mainly advised to expand points and include more references), especially James Kirkwood, Frank McMillan and Sean Wensley (especially for the last chapter). Thank you to all who gave photographs, as credited, especially Fiona, Jane and Mandy. Thanks also to the anonymous reviewers for useful and positive comments. Finally, belated thanks to many people, but especially David Main, David Morton, Carl Padgett and Peter Sandøe for help and support back when I first started thinking about animal welfare.
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1.1 Animal Welfare Accounts

Veterinary professionals are concerned about animal welfare. Animal welfare, loosely defined, is about what is good and bad for animals – what is important for them to achieve and what is important for them to avoid. Veterinary work is about achieving states that are good for animals, such as health and enjoyment of life, and avoiding states that are bad, such as pain and illness. So core aims of veterinary work overlap considerably, if not entirely, with animal welfare concerns. This is why many of us chose to train in veterinary science, medicine or nursing and why most of us wanted to work within the profession.

Every person in the world has an effect on animal welfare. How they treat animals they own or meet; what food and clothes they buy; which charities they give money to; what they enjoy as entertainment and their environmental impact can have an effect on the lives of many animals. This effect may be sometimes beneficial. It may also be harmful. Each person probably effects a combination of harm and benefit (even the kindest people do some harm and even the most evil people may help animals by accident) and has an overall impact on animals’ welfare. Each person has an animal welfare account, based on all their welfare impacts. If a person does more harm than good, then they have a negative balance. If a person does more good than harm, this is to their credit.

Those of us in veterinary practice are especially likely to have significant impacts on the welfare of patients and other animals. Sometimes, we have a positive impact by lessening the harms caused by other people or by natural processes such as