



VETERINARY IRELAND POLICY

PAIN CONTROL IN FARM ANIMALS

Farm animal welfare is a human responsibility that encompasses all aspects of animal well-being, including proper housing, management, nutrition, disease prevention, responsible care, humane handling, and, where necessary, humane euthanasia. Veterinarians have a legally binding ethical undertaking on joining the profession to ensure that the welfare of animals in their care is safeguarded and can demonstrate this commitment on a daily basis. Animal welfare advocacy is a priority of Veterinary Ireland. Through its Animal Welfare Committee, it concentrates its efforts on developing guidelines and standards that address the welfare, humane treatment and care of animals. Pain management is a key element in this context. Veterinary Ireland opposes the performance of surgery on any animal without the use of appropriate anesthetic and analgesic drugs. The potential for pain in animals with surgical or medical conditions must always be considered, and such pain should be prevented or treated whenever possible.

Background

Nociception and the pathophysiology of pain in animals are well described (1,2). Species-typical responses to pain are increasingly well understood. Thus the capacity of animals to experience pain is no longer a matter of debate, and absence of pain should not be surmised from the stoic behaviour that is typical of most domestic species (3-5). Instead, a precautionary approach is required, to practice veterinary medicine in an ethical and humane manner. In the case of surgically-induced pain, successful management typically requires the use of analgesic drugs preoperatively and postoperatively, in combinations that ensure intervention at more than one level of the nociceptive pathway. The concurrent use of two or more pharmacological classes of analgesic drugs (opioids, alpha-2 agonists, anti-inflammatories, local anesthetics, dissociative anesthetics) generally provides more effective pain control with fewer side-effects than therapy with a single drug (1,2). While sedatives (phenothiazines, benzodiazepines) and general anaesthetics (thiopental, propofol, inhaled anaesthetics) alter the perception of pain, they do not substantially alter nociceptive processing and should not be considered analgesic drugs. Currently, some anaesthetic and analgesic drugs are licensed for use in companion animals, but few are licensed for use in farm animals. Veterinary Ireland recognises that there is an urgent need to approve anaesthetic and analgesic drugs for ruminants and swine, and to provide veterinarians and producers with appropriate withdrawal times for these drugs.

Policy

Veterinarians are obligated to manage perioperative pain effectively with the use of appropriate anesthetic and analgesic drugs in the performance of surgical procedures (e.g., ovariohysterectomy, dehorning) and to be aware of and treat pain associated with medical conditions (5) in companion and farm animals. Given the current dearth of anesthetic and analgesic drugs licensed for use in farm animals Veterinary Ireland supports the responsible use of the cascade system where required to ensure the humane treatment of animals. Veterinary Ireland also urges regulators to develop programs that facilitate approval of both old and new anesthetic and analgesic drugs. Veterinary Ireland supports the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Practitioners as laid down by the Veterinary Council of Ireland which states: **PROVISION AT ALL TIMES FOR RELIEF OF PAIN/SUFFERING:** Veterinary practitioners, whether in a private or a salaried capacity, who provide a direct veterinary service to the public for their animals, must make proper provision at all times for the relief of the pain

or the suffering of those animals and for their further treatment, when necessary, either by themselves or through professional colleagues. Where the veterinary practitioner who attended the case is unavailable, veterinary service may be provided, by arrangement, by a colleague member of the same practice or by another veterinary practitioner. ANIMAL WELFARE THE PRIMARY CONCERN OF THE VETERINARY PROFESSION The primary concern of the profession is for the welfare of animals and a veterinary practitioner shall at all times act to protect animal health and relieve animal suffering. ANALGESIA AND ANAESTHESIA FOR SURGERY Effective analgesia and anaesthesia shall be utilised on all animals undergoing surgery, including routine animal husbandry type surgical procedures covered under legislation. GUIDELINES FOR SURGERY A veterinary practitioner shall not perform an act of veterinary surgery on an animal, which causes it pain or suffering unless it is in the interest of the animal or other animals, or society”.

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