

EDITORIAL

VETERINARY NURSING – THE CASE AND THE CAUSE

The practice of veterinary profession has undergone a sea change during the past few decades. Modern diagnostic tools and clinical laboratory support have helped the vet in advancing his/her practice with latest scientific knowledge and skills. For long, manpower assistance for the vet consisted of livestock assistants, veterinary livestock inspectors, stockmen, field men and farm managers drawn from personnel with short course trainings or non-veterinary animal husbandry degrees. As the specialization of the practicing vet gets more and more focussed, the need for para-veterinary assistance becomes more than ever felt today. However, there is a widespread and genuine apprehension among the vets that any person who comes with non-veterinary educational and training back up, ultimately tends to indulge in unethical and unauthorized veterinary practice to the detriment of the health and welfare of animals. In setting up clinical practice, whether private or public, the veterinary profession has always benefited by adopting the models of human medical clinics. As India is already recognized with the reputation of an ultimate medical destination drawing patients from all over the world including the developed countries because of the expertise available and cost effectiveness of the treatment offered, the country is also poised to emerge as one of the strongest destinations for tropical veterinary medicine. Veterinary nursing is one area of para-veterinary education wherein the trained para-veterinary personnel may be expected to strengthen the services of the vet in his/her practice without any scope to indulge in any unauthorized practice, provided the vigilance on the part of the veterinary councils at the national and state levels is strict.

Today, the veterinary nursing course in India is non-existent and the tasks are carried out by vets themselves mostly with the assistance of ill-equipped non-technical personnel. The best nurse for the animals today is the farmer or the pet animal owner who has gained practical wisdom in nursing through experience, love, affection and nearness to the animals. But, in an institutionalized situation like veterinary clinic, nursing assistance is a prerequisite to treatment. Nursing is not just about animal handling. It is a professional training starting with the entry of animal for treatment as in-patient or out-patient and ending up with the safe discharge of the animal after successful treatment and post-treatment care. Every activity of a competent nurse is undertaken with professional supervision of the vet. Preparing the animal for treatment, collection of history and basic data and information on the animal, recording of temperature, blood pressure, collection of samples for clinical investigation, labelling, providing injections, bandaging, first aid during critical care management, assistance during surgical and operative procedures, pre-natal and post-natal care of pregnant animals, neonate care, post-operative, convalescence care and in-house para-veterinary care of the animal and record/case sheet maintenance are among the several duties vested with the veterinary nurse. The nursing course-curricula for vet nurses are available in the universities and colleges of many developed countries. The duration and contents of the course must be such as to differentiate them distinctly from those of the veterinary degree programme and also must be in consonance with the requirements of our country and its different geographical regions.

There may be several ifs and buts before such an attempt is ventured. We do not have nursing colleges or nursing councils as we have for the medical profession. There is a need for detailed discussions with the practicing vets, both from private and public institutions on the implications of such an initiative. Such initiatives must come from the Veterinary Council of India, state veterinary councils, veterinary colleges, veterinary and animal science universities, departments of animal husbandry and veterinary services and major stake holders like the farming community and the pet owners. If the chief intention of such an exercise is to safeguard, protect and strengthen the services of the practicing vet, it will be a most welcome endeavour. In any case, it is the ultimate wisdom of the veterinary profession and welfare of the animals which will lead the professionals to move towards such policy initiatives.

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