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VETERINARY ACTS

1. The Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) is the representative body for approximately 200,000 veterinarians in 37 European countries. The General Assembly comprises representatives from 43 national organisations, including regulatory authorities, and 4 international groups representing specific spheres of activity.
2. The veterinary profession is a well-educated and trained liberal profession, practising a wide range of activities on the basis of specific qualifications which are not just limited to private clinical practice. These qualifications provide intellectual and practical services to clients and patients and to the general public in a personal, responsible and independent manner. The veterinary profession is also a regulated profession. In order to avoid inferior services which could harm animal health and welfare, as well as public health, access to and the practise of veterinary medicine and surgery is subject to adequate training for the particular purpose and to registration and/or control by national competent authorities.
3. The European public has come to demand a high level of protection of animal welfare for all species, and a high degree of quality assurance in the ethical production of food of animal origin as the profession assists in safeguarding both animal and public health. Companion animals have become even more important as 'members of the family'.
4. The FVE is concerned that there are too many people carrying out veterinary tasks without a clear mission, or without appropriate education or training. In many countries groups of non-veterinarians who perform certain 'veterinary tasks' are already established. Increasingly, these groups wish to undertake more of the traditional veterinary work and, in some countries at least, there are moves by government bodies to undermine the role of the veterinarian and to encourage the transfer of the veterinary role to others.
5. Where veterinary acts are undefined and unregulated, there is a danger that the welfare of animals and the reputation of the veterinary profession may suffer, and animal and public health are compromised.

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6. The FVE believes that the veterinary profession should be acknowledged as possessing a unique competence and expertise which can guarantee a high level of animal health and welfare, as well as bringing an important contribution to human health and public safety. However, the purpose of this paper is not to protect the veterinary profession but to protect the welfare and improve the health of animals. FVE accepts that some veterinary Acts may be delegated to non-veterinarians but takes the view that such persons should be appropriately trained for what they do.
7. Such restrictions are in the interests of ensuring that animals are treated only by people qualified to do so.
8. **FVE has therefore adopted the following definition of veterinary acts:**

Definition of veterinary acts

- a. all material or intellectual interventions that have as their objective to diagnose, treat, or prevent mental or physical disease, injury, pain, or defect in an animal, or to determine the health and welfare status of an animal or group of animals, particularly its physiological status; including the prescription of veterinary medicines.
- b. all interventions that cause or have the potential to cause pain;
- c. all invasive interventions.
- d. all veterinary interventions, including food or feed chain activities, affecting public health
- e. veterinary certification relating to any of the above

9. Criterion (a) emphasises the traditional role of the veterinarian in the art as well as the science of veterinary medicine and surgery, whereas the remaining criteria refer to the more practical aspects of veterinary activities. It should be noted that some interventions may be either material or intellectual, or both, and may also satisfy either one or more of the criteria.
10. The FVE strongly believes that the acts of examination, diagnosis, recommendations for subsequent action, and the prescription of medicines or surgery are all strongly linked and must be the exclusive preserve of the veterinarian. A diagnosis cannot be made without examination, either physical examination of the animal or investigative examination of samples. A treatment cannot be recommended or a surgical intervention performed without an examination and a diagnosis. The same applies to a veterinary prescription.
11. The FVE makes the same argument in respect of the role of the veterinarian undertaking official tasks, who has an equally important role in Animal Health, Public Health and Animal Welfare.
12. Only a veterinarian can take the holistic approach in any given situation and, in addition to the application of scientific principles, to exercise the art of

veterinary medicine and surgery by virtue of evidence based scientific knowledge and established experience.

13. The OIE Terrestrial Animal Health Code defines ‘veterinary paraprofessional’ as follows;

a person who, for the purposes of the *Terrestrial Code*, is authorised by the *veterinary statutory body* to carry out certain designated tasks (dependent upon the category of *veterinary para-professional*) in a country, and delegated to them under the responsibility and direction of a *veterinarian*. The tasks authorized for each category of *veterinary para-professional* should be defined by the *veterinary statutory body* depending on qualifications and training, and according to need.

14. FVE accepts the delegation of certain tasks/interventions to those who are technically and legally competent and subject to varying levels of veterinary supervision appropriate to the specific task. Such delegation can be encouraged in the interests of the client, the consumer, and the general public, which has a right to expect economic activities as well as ethical procedures in terms of welfare and the environment.

15. In the course of encouraging the delegation of certain tasks it is expected that anomalies surrounding the current legality/illegality can be removed. It must also be expected that para-professionals are properly trained in full cooperation with the veterinary profession in certain, limited, procedures which provides effective treatment for all animals and ensures enhanced public confidence in the production of safe food and in the veterinary profession.

16. However, certain principles should be established first.

- a. Law and practise must conform. It is not acceptable that the different groups should be given the legal right to care for animals or to undertake certain interventions without an equal legal obligation for competence and regulation.
- b. The competence of the individual must be assured
- c. It is necessary to determine the level of responsibility and the relationship with the veterinarian who may have overall responsibility and control, for example:
 - i. interventions may be carried out under the authority of and/or in the presence of the veterinarian
 - ii. interventions may be carried out under the authority of the veterinarian who is able to intervene in an emergency
 - iii. interventions carried out in the absence of the veterinarian
 - iv. independent or autonomous interventions
- d. the level of legal responsibility must be proportional to the level of practical responsibility.

17. Overall, based on models already established in the medical health professions we can foresee a general, and sometimes specialised, competence for veterinarians (who are basically qualified to carry out all

interventions) and specific or restricted competences for clearly identified professions or activities.

18. In conclusion, differences in historical and cultural backgrounds between countries and people have led to diversity in national legislation. Ever growing international contacts and the increasing number of veterinarians providing cross-border services or establishing in other countries have created a need for a clear, practical and international definition of veterinary acts. There is an unbreakable link between animal health (whatever the species), animal welfare, food safety and public health and welfare. It is the veterinarian who occupies a pivotal position within that chain.

