REDVET - Revista electrónica de Veterinaria - ISSN 1695-7504
Vol 25, No. 1 (2024)
http://www.veterinaria.org
Article Received: 10 October 2023; Revised: 22 November 2023; Accepted: 16 December 2023

Ethical Frameworks in Veterinary Medicine: Navigating Complexities for Improved Animal Welfare and Human Health

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Abstract:

Ethical considerations form the bedrock of veterinary medicine, serving as the guiding principles for practitioners in navigating the intricate landscape of animal care and human health. This paper explores the multifaceted nature of ethical frameworks within veterinary medicine, emphasizing their critical role in enhancing both animal welfare and human health outcomes. The first section delves into the foundational principles that underpin ethical decision-making in veterinary practice. It highlights the significance of principles such as beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy in guiding veterinarians through complex clinical scenarios. By adhering to these principles, veterinarians can ensure that their actions prioritize the well-being of animals while respecting the autonomy and rights of their human clients. The second section examines the ethical challenges inherent in balancing the interests of individual animals with those of larger populations and ecosystems. It discusses the concept of One Health, which underscores the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, and advocates for a collaborative approach to address shared health challenges. Additionally, it explores dilemmas related to resource allocation, triage, and the ethical implications of emerging technologies in veterinary medicine. The third section explores the ethical considerations surrounding animal research and experimentation. It discusses the principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement (the 3Rs) as guiding principles for ethical research involving animals, emphasizing the importance of minimizing harm and maximizing benefit. Furthermore, it addresses the ethical complexities of end-of-life care, euthanasia, and decision-making in situations of suffering and terminal illness.

Keywords: Veterinary Ethics, Animal Welfare, One Health, Ethical Decision-Making, Animal Research, Euthanasia

I. Introduction

Ethical frameworks are the cornerstone of veterinary medicine, shaping the decisions and actions of practitioners as they navigate the intricate landscape of animal care and human health. These frameworks provide a moral compass, guiding veterinarians in upholding the principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy in their professional practice. Significance of Ethical Frameworks in Veterinary Medicine: The significance of ethical frameworks in veterinary medicine cannot be overstated. Veterinarians are entrusted with the health and well-being of animals, which often involves making complex decisions that impact not only the individual animal but also broader societal interests [1]. Ethical frameworks

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provide a structured approach for veterinarians to assess and address these complexities, ensuring that their actions are guided by principles that prioritize animal welfare while also considering the implications for human health and the environment. Ethical frameworks also serve as a safeguard against potential conflicts of interest and unethical practices within the veterinary profession. By adhering to established ethical principles, veterinarians can maintain the trust and confidence of their clients and the public, thereby upholding the integrity of the profession as a whole. Purpose of the Paper: Navigating Complexities for Improved Outcomes: The primary purpose of this paper is to explore the multifaceted nature of ethical frameworks in veterinary medicine and to demonstrate their critical importance in achieving improved outcomes for both animals and humans [2]. By navigating the complexities of ethical decision-making, veterinarians can contribute to enhanced animal welfare, improved human health, and a more sustainable relationship between humans, animals, and the environment.

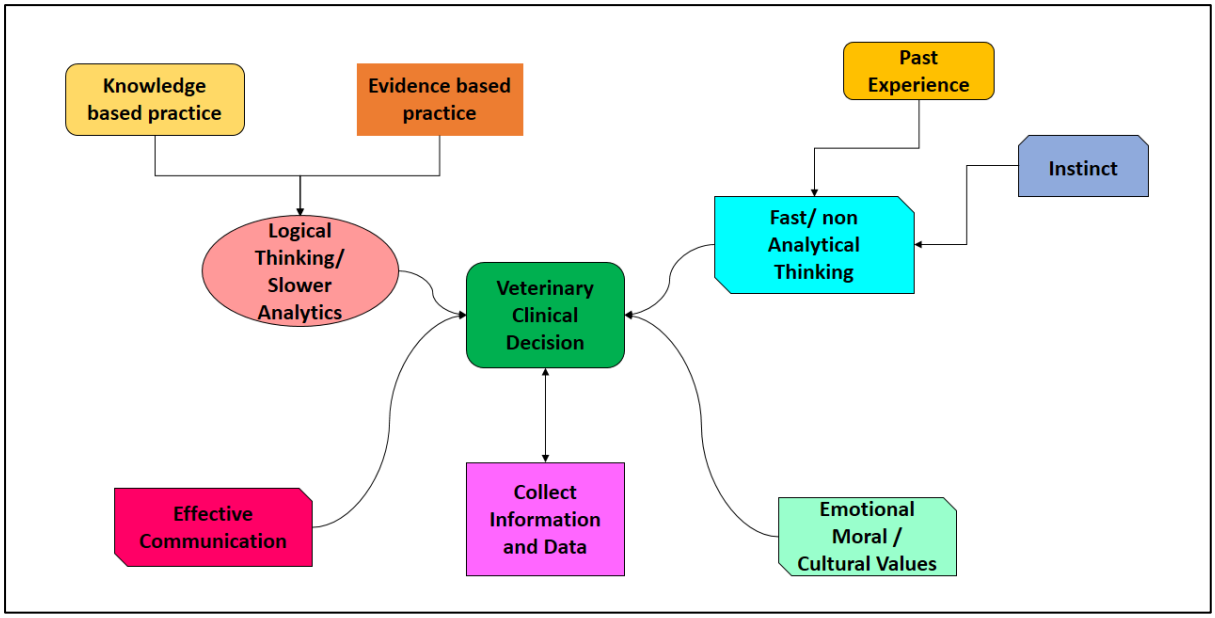

Figure 1: Representation of Decision making in Veterinary Nursing

Through an in-depth examination of ethical principles and their application in veterinary practice, this paper aims to provide veterinarians with the knowledge and tools they need to address ethical dilemmas effectively [3]. By fostering a deeper understanding of ethical frameworks, veterinarians can make informed decisions that uphold the highest standards of professionalism and integrity. Furthermore, this paper seeks to stimulate dialogue and reflection within the veterinary community regarding the ethical challenges and responsibilities inherent in veterinary practice [4]. By engaging in open and honest discussions about these issues, veterinarians can work together to develop ethical guidelines and best practices that promote the common good and advance the welfare of animals and humans alike.

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Table 1: Summary of Related work

Method	Approach	Key Finding	Scope	Limitation
Ethical analysis and literature review	Examining case studies and ethical theories to analyze the ethical decision-making process in veterinary practice [5]	Identification of common ethical dilemmas faced by veterinarians and exploration of strategies for ethical decision-making	Veterinary practice	Limited to ethical decision-making within the veterinary context
Cross-disciplinary collaboration and research [6]	Collaboration between veterinarians, physicians, environmental scientists, and public health officials to address shared health challenges	Recognition of the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health and the need for collaborative approaches to address complex health issues	Human, animal, and environmental health	May face challenges related to coordinating efforts across different disciplines and sectors
Survey and statistical analysis [7]	Collecting data on resource allocation practices in veterinary emergency medicine settings and analyzing survey responses	Identification of common resource allocation practices and factors influencing decision-making in veterinary emergency medicine	Veterinary emergency medicine settings	May not capture all factors influencing resource allocation decisions and may be limited by sample size and response bias
Literature review and ethical analysis [8]	Reviewing ethical principles, regulations, and guidelines governing animal research and analyzing ethical dilemmas	Examination of ethical dilemmas in animal research and exploration of strategies for promoting animal welfare while advancing scientific knowledge	Animal research	Focuses specifically on ethical considerations in animal research and may not address broader ethical issues in veterinary medicine
Case studies and qualitative research [9]	Conducting interviews and case studies to explore the provision of palliative care to animals with cancer	Identification of common challenges and strategies in providing palliative care to animals with cancer	Veterinary oncology	Limited to the provision of palliative care to animals with cancer and may not address other end-of-

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				life care considerations in veterinary medicine
Surveys and interviews [10]	Surveying veterinarians and conducting interviews to assess attitudes and perceptions towards emerging technologies in veterinary practice	Assessment of attitudes towards and barriers to the adoption of emerging technologies in veterinary practice	Veterinary practice	May not capture all perspectives or address all barriers to the adoption of emerging technologies in veterinary practice
Epidemiological analysis and modelling [11]	Analyzing epidemiological data and using mathematical models to assess the transmission dynamics and public health impact of zoonotic diseases	Identification of factors influencing the transmission of zoonotic diseases and assessment of their public health implications	Public health	Focuses specifically on zoonotic diseases and may not address other public health concerns related to veterinary medicine
Ethical analysis and case studies [12]	Examining ethical principles and case studies to analyze ethical considerations in euthanasia decision-making	Exploration of ethical dilemmas and best practices in euthanasia decision-making in veterinary medicine	End-of-life care	May not address all factors influencing euthanasia decision-making or consider different perspectives on the topic
Regulatory analysis and qualitative research [13]	Reviewing regulations and guidelines governing telemedicine in veterinary medicine and conducting interviews to explore attitudes and experiences with telemedicine	Assessment of regulatory landscape, attitudes, and experiences with telemedicine in veterinary practice	Veterinary practice	May not capture all perspectives or regulatory nuances related to telemedicine in veterinary practice

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Environmental monitoring and risk assessment [14]	Conducting environmental monitoring studies and risk assessments to evaluate the impact of veterinary pharmaceuticals on ecosystems and human health	Identification of environmental risks associated with the use of veterinary pharmaceuticals and assessment of their potential impacts	Environmental health	Focuses specifically on the environmental impact of veterinary pharmaceuticals and may not address other environmental health concerns related to veterinary medicine

II. Balancing Individual and Collective Interests

The complexities of veterinary medicine often require practitioners to balance the interests of individual animals with those of larger populations and ecosystems. This section explores the concept of One Health, collaborative approaches to shared health challenges, ethical dilemmas in resource allocation and triage, and the ethical implications of emerging technologies. One Health is a holistic approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. By acknowledging the interdependencies between these domains, One Health advocates for a collaborative and interdisciplinary approach to addressing shared health challenges. In veterinary medicine, this approach is particularly relevant in the context of zoonotic diseases, which can have significant implications for both animal and human health [15]. By promoting collaboration between veterinarians, physicians, environmental scientists, and other stakeholders, One Health initiatives aim to prevent and control infectious diseases, mitigate environmental health risks, and promote the health and well-being of all living beings. Collaborative approaches to shared health challenges require veterinarians to consider the broader implications of their actions on human health, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. This may involve participating in interdisciplinary teams, sharing data and expertise, and engaging in public health surveillance and monitoring efforts. By working together across disciplines and sectors, veterinarians can contribute to more effective disease surveillance and control efforts, enhance public awareness of zoonotic risks, and promote policies and practices that support the health of both animals and humans. Ethical dilemmas in resource allocation and triage often arise in situations where demand for veterinary services exceeds available resources. Veterinarians may be faced with difficult decisions about how to allocate limited resources, such as medical supplies, staff time, and financial assistance, in a fair and equitable manner.

A. The concept of One Health:

The concept of One Health recognizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, emphasizing the need for collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches

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to addressing shared health challenges. In the context of veterinary medicine, One Health acknowledges that the health and well-being of animals, humans, and the environment are closely linked, and that interventions in one domain can have profound implications for the others. By adopting a One Health approach, veterinarians work alongside physicians, environmental scientists, public health professionals, policymakers, and other stakeholders to identify and address complex health issues that transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries. This includes addressing zoonotic diseases, such as rabies, Ebola, and avian influenza, which can be transmitted between animals and humans and have significant public health implications. One Health initiatives also aim to address emerging threats, such as antimicrobial resistance, foodborne illnesses, and environmental pollution, by promoting collaboration, data sharing, and coordinated action across sectors. By recognizing the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, One Health provides a framework for promoting health, preventing disease, and safeguarding the well-being of all living beings [16].

B. Collaborative approaches to shared health challenges:

Collaborative approaches to shared health challenges involve bringing together diverse stakeholders to address complex health issues that affect multiple populations and sectors. In veterinary medicine, collaborative approaches often center around the concept of One Health, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health. Collaborative initiatives may involve partnerships between veterinarians, physicians, public health officials, policymakers, researchers, community leaders, and other stakeholders to address shared health challenges such as zoonotic diseases, food safety, and environmental health hazards. By pooling expertise, resources, and perspectives from different disciplines and sectors, collaborative approaches can enhance surveillance, prevention, and control efforts, improve health outcomes, and promote sustainable and equitable solutions to complex health problems. Collaborative approaches also facilitate information sharing, capacity building, and knowledge exchange, fostering a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and collective action. By working together across sectors and disciplines, veterinarians can leverage their unique skills and insights to address shared health challenges more effectively and promote the health and well-being of animals, humans, and the environment.

C. Ethical dilemmas in resource allocation and triage:

Ethical dilemmas in resource allocation and triage arise when demand for veterinary services exceeds available resources, forcing veterinarians to make difficult decisions about how to allocate limited resources in a fair and equitable manner. These dilemmas may occur in various contexts, such as disaster response, public health emergencies, and everyday clinical practice. In disaster situations, veterinarians may be faced with limited supplies, personnel, and facilities, requiring them to prioritize care for the most severely injured or ill animals while balancing the needs of the larger population. Similarly, in everyday clinical practice, veterinarians may encounter situations where they must allocate scarce resources, such as medical supplies, diagnostic tests, or surgical procedures, among competing patients with different needs and priorities. Ethical frameworks, such as those based on principles of distributive justice, utility, and fairness, can help veterinarians navigate these dilemmas and make ethically defensible decisions that prioritize the greatest good for the greatest number of animals. However, resource allocation decisions may still pose ethical challenges, particularly when there are competing interests, limited information, or conflicting values at play.

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Veterinarians must approach resource allocation and triage decisions with careful consideration of ethical principles, transparency, and accountability, while also recognizing the limitations of available resources and the need to prioritize care based on clinical urgency, prognosis, and potential for benefit.

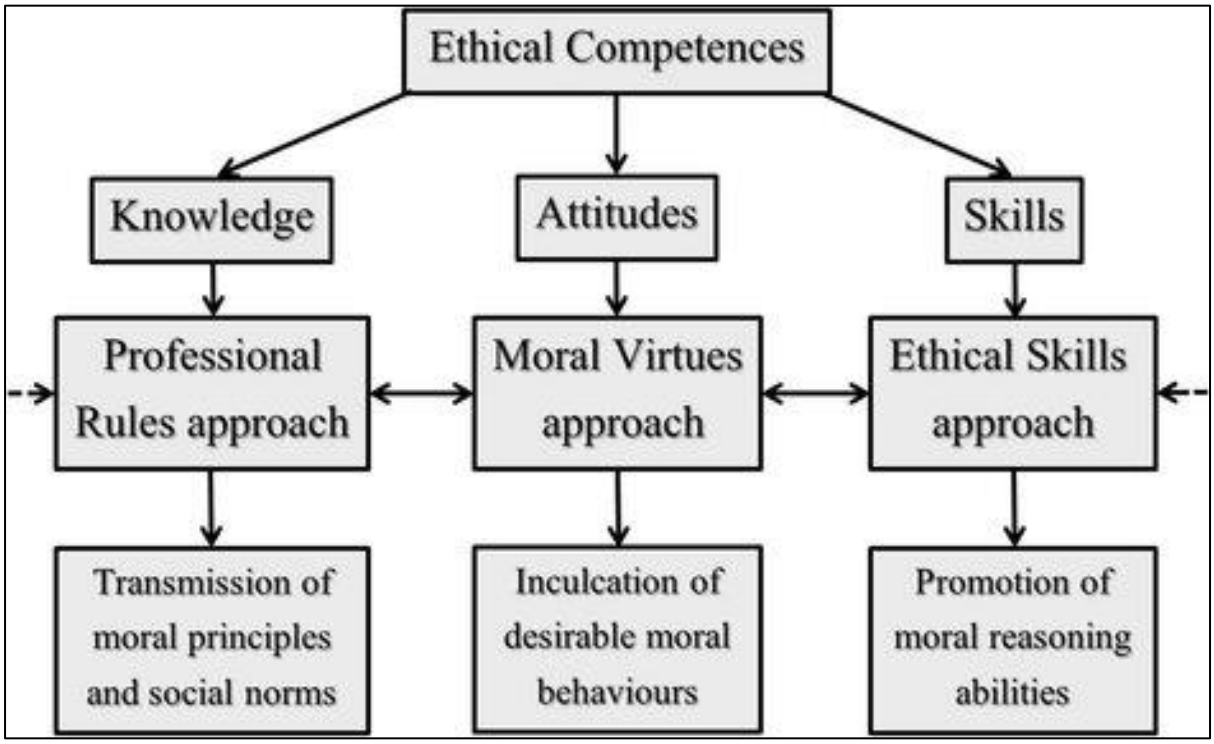

Figure 2: Ethical dilemmas in resource allocation

D. Emerging technologies and ethical implications:

Emerging technologies in veterinary medicine hold great promise for improving animal health, welfare, and productivity, but they also raise ethical concerns related to safety, efficacy, equity, and unintended consequences. These technologies include advancements in areas such as gene editing, stem cell therapy, telemedicine, and artificial intelligence, which have the potential to revolutionize veterinary care and research. However, their adoption and use must be guided by ethical principles and considerations to ensure that they are used responsibly and ethically. For example, gene editing technologies such as CRISPR-Cas9 offer new opportunities for treating genetic diseases and improving animal health, but they also raise ethical questions about genetic manipulation, informed consent, and potential unintended effects on animal welfare and biodiversity [17]. Similarly, telemedicine technologies enable remote diagnosis, consultation, and treatment, expanding access to veterinary care in underserved areas, but they also raise concerns about patient privacy, data security, and the quality of care provided. Ethical frameworks, guidelines, and regulations play a crucial role in addressing these ethical concerns and ensuring that emerging technologies are developed, evaluated, and implemented in a manner that prioritizes the well-being of animals, humans, and the environment. Veterinarians must engage in ongoing dialogue, education, and ethical reflection to navigate the complex

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ethical implications of emerging technologies and promote responsible innovation in veterinary medicine.

III. Ethical Considerations in Animal Research

Animal research has long been a cornerstone of veterinary medicine, contributing to advancements in medical knowledge, treatments, and technologies that benefit both animals and humans. However, the use of animals in research also raises complex ethical considerations related to the welfare and rights of research subjects. This section examines the principles of replacement, reduction, and refinement (the 3Rs), ethical oversight and regulation, and the ethical complexities of balancing scientific progress with animal welfare. The principle of replacement emphasizes the importance of seeking alternatives to the use of animals in research whenever possible. Advances in technology and methodology have led to the development of alternative research models, such as in vitro studies, computer simulations, and tissue engineering, which can reduce or replace the need for animal experimentation. By prioritizing the use of non-animal methods, veterinarians can minimize harm to animals while still advancing scientific knowledge and innovation. Reduction focuses on minimizing the number of animals used in research studies to achieve scientific objectives. This involves careful experimental design, sample size calculation, and statistical analysis to ensure that studies are conducted with the smallest number of animals necessary to obtain valid and reliable results. Veterinarians play a critical role in advocating for the responsible use of animals in research and promoting alternatives to unnecessary or redundant experimentation. Refinement aims to minimize pain, distress, and suffering experienced by animals used in research studies. This involves implementing humane and ethical procedures, such as proper anesthesia, analgesia, and euthanasia techniques, as well as providing enriching environments and social housing for laboratory animals. Veterinarians are responsible for ensuring that research protocols prioritize animal welfare and comply with ethical standards and regulatory requirements.

IV. End-of-Life Care and Euthanasia

A. Ethical considerations in decision-making:

Ethical considerations are paramount in end-of-life decision-making in veterinary medicine. Veterinarians are tasked with making decisions that balance the welfare of the animal, the needs and desires of the pet owner, and their own professional and ethical obligations. Key ethical considerations include:

1. Beneficence and Non-Maleficence: Veterinarians must weigh the benefits of continued treatment or intervention against the potential harm or suffering experienced by the animal. The decision to pursue euthanasia should aim to alleviate the animal's suffering and promote their well-being, while avoiding unnecessary pain or distress.
2. Autonomy: Pet owners have the right to make decisions about their animal's care, including end-of-life decisions. Veterinarians must respect the owner's autonomy while providing them with the information and support they need to make informed decisions that are in the best interests of the animal.

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3. Truthfulness and Transparency: Veterinarians have a duty to provide honest and accurate information to pet owners about the animal's prognosis, treatment options, and quality of life considerations. Open communication fosters trust and enables pet owners to make decisions that align with their values and preferences.
4. Professional Integrity: Veterinarians must uphold the highest standards of professionalism and integrity in their practice, ensuring that decisions are guided by ethical principles and best practices in veterinary medicine. This includes avoiding conflicts of interest and prioritizing the welfare of the animal above all else.

B. Quality of life assessments:

Quality of life assessments are critical in determining whether euthanasia is appropriate for an animal nearing the end of their life. These assessments involve evaluating various aspects of the animal's well-being, including physical health, behavior, and emotional state. Key considerations in quality of life assessments include:

1. Pain and Suffering: Veterinarians must assess the animal's level of pain and discomfort, as well as their ability to experience pleasure and engage in normal activities. Signs of pain and suffering may include changes in appetite, mobility, and behavior, as well as vocalizations and signs of distress.
2. Functional Status: Veterinarians evaluate the animal's ability to perform basic activities of daily living, such as eating, drinking, urinating, defecating, and moving around. Loss of function or independence may indicate a decline in quality of life and warrant further consideration of euthanasia.

Table 2: Representing quality of life assessments

Animal	Physical Well-being	Emotional Well-being	Social Interaction	Overall Quality of Life
Dog (Buddy)	Good	Moderate	Limited	Fair
Cat (Whiskers)	Fair	Good	Excellent	Good
Horse (Thunder)	Poor	Fair	Fair	Poor
Rabbit (Snowball)	Moderate	Poor	Poor	Poor

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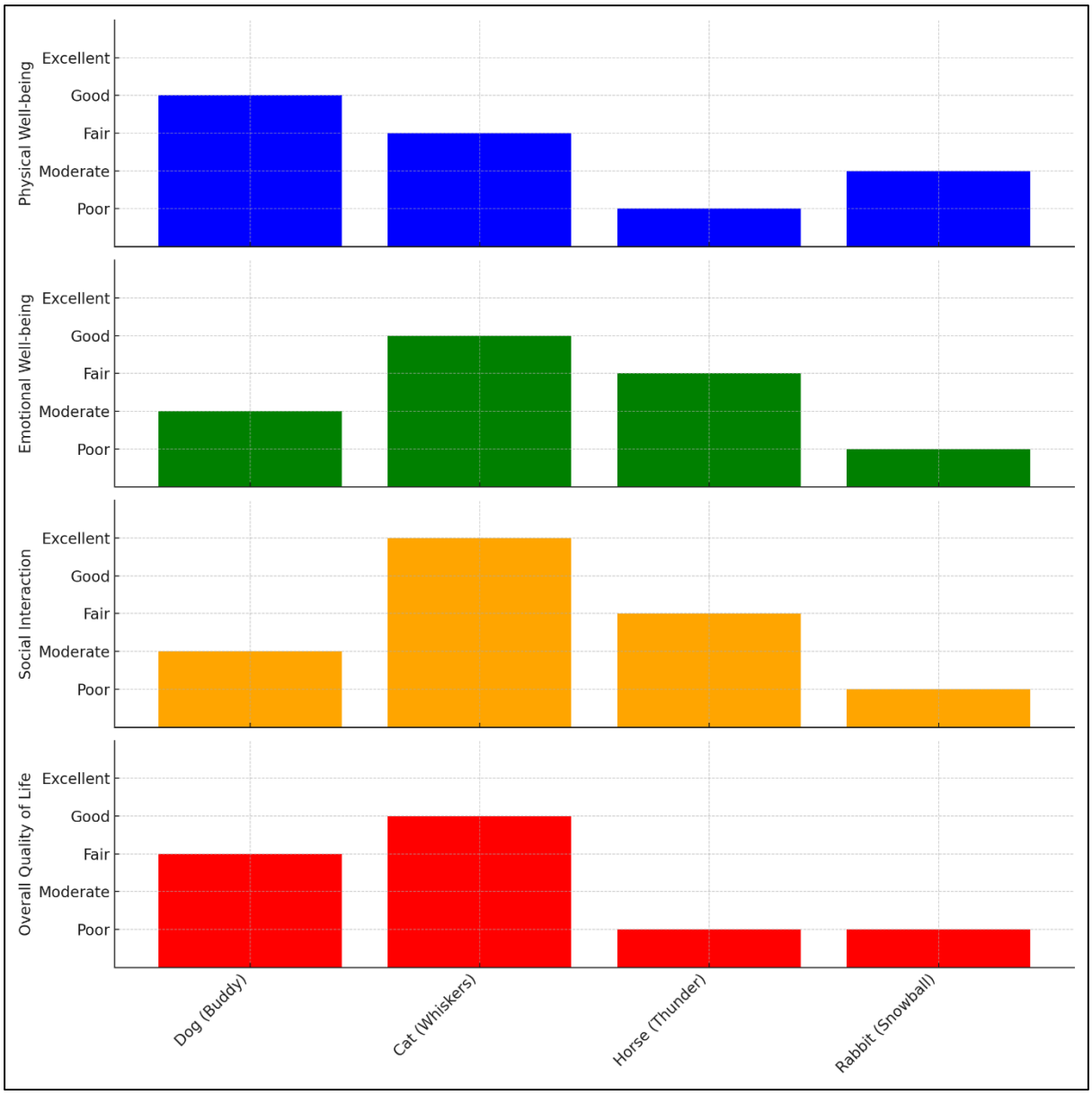

Figure 3: Overview of quality of life assessments with different parameters

C. Palliative care options:

Palliative care focuses on providing comfort, symptom management, and emotional support to animals with terminal illnesses or chronic conditions. Palliative care aims to improve the animal's quality of life and minimize suffering, without seeking to cure the underlying disease. Key palliative care options include:

1. Pain Management: Veterinarians may prescribe medications or other treatments to alleviate pain and discomfort in animals with terminal illnesses. Pain management strategies may include analgesics, anti-inflammatory drugs, physical therapy, acupuncture, and massage therapy.

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2. Symptom Control: Palliative care aims to manage symptoms associated with the underlying disease or condition, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, respiratory distress, and cognitive dysfunction. Veterinarians work closely with pet owners to develop individualized treatment plans that address the animal's specific needs and preferences.
3. Nutritional Support: Maintaining adequate nutrition is essential for supporting the overall health and well-being of animals with terminal illnesses. Veterinarians may recommend dietary modifications, nutritional supplements, or appetite stimulants to ensure that the animal receives the nutrients they need to maintain strength and vitality.

V. Conclusion

Ethical frameworks are integral to the practice of veterinary medicine, providing a compass for navigating the complexities inherent in caring for animals and promoting the health of both animals and humans. Throughout this paper, we have explored the foundational principles of veterinary ethics, including beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy, which guide veterinarians in making difficult decisions that prioritize animal welfare while respecting the rights and values of their clients. The concept of One Health underscores the interconnectedness of human, animal, and environmental health, emphasizing the importance of collaborative approaches to addressing shared health challenges. By working together across disciplines and sectors, veterinarians can contribute to improved health outcomes, enhanced disease surveillance, and more effective prevention and control efforts. Ethical dilemmas in veterinary medicine, such as those related to resource allocation and triage, require careful consideration of competing interests, values, and priorities. Veterinarians must approach these dilemmas with integrity, transparency, and compassion, striving to balance the needs of individual animals with those of larger populations and ecosystems. Emerging technologies offer exciting opportunities for advancing veterinary care and research, but they also raise ethical concerns related to safety, efficacy, and unintended consequences. Veterinarians must engage in ongoing dialogue and ethical reflection to ensure that emerging technologies are developed, evaluated, and implemented in a manner that promotes the well-being of animals, humans, and the environment.

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