



## Veterinary dilemmas in COVID times

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The exercise of veterinary medicine and ethical dilemmas are inextricably linked. The mission of the Royal Veterinary Association of The Netherlands (KNMvD) and many associations is "*To the well-being of people and animals*" may seem unambiguous, but on closer inspection it is by no means. The interests of humans and the interests of animals are regularly at odds with each other. The veterinarian is constantly faced with dilemmas and has to decide which option, in the given situation, is the good, right, and fair one.

Under the current corona-virus pandemic this is in principle no different. However, the circumstances and specific questions and dilemmas will differ. The well-being of humans, especially public health, is more under pressure than usual. It is in everyone's interest to control the spread of the virus as quickly as possible. This implies far-reaching measures that affect all of us all, and have a direct effect on animals and on our veterinary professional freedom and responsibility.

The question is how to deal with this as a veterinarian. Everyone will understand that non-urgent veterinary care is better postponed for a while. But how far can you go? What do you define as urgent? And something that is not urgent at the moment, can become critical in the long run. A similar question applies to the use of medicinal products and other means of treatment, which can also be used for human patients. How do you deal with scarcity and how can you provide good veterinary care in this way?

Crucial in all these matters is to keep calm and not to be swayed by the issues of the day or influenced by hypes and small talk on social media. Even more than under normal circumstances, it is important that the veterinarian takes responsibility and builds his or her considerations on well-founded and valid reasoning. This involves - as always - carefully weighing the value and interests of the animal, the owner, public health, and also those of the veterinarian himself. This is not easy, but at the same time it offers an opportunity to highlight the significance of the veterinarian. This can be done by taking three steps

**1. Animal central:** Also in this situation it is important to focus on the animal and to consider what is in the interest of the animal. The current situation limits the possibilities, but it remains important to clarify what - ideally - is necessary for the animal. This helps in making a choice to postpone treatments in whole or in part or, on the other hand, in considering whether to intervene immediately.

**2. Clear communication:** owners have no experience with the current situation. That is why communication is essential, especially by practicing veterinarians who have direct contact with animal owners. It's not only about explaining what you do or don't do, but also about explaining the why of your choice. Make balancing the different interests transparent for all parties involved.

**3. Use professional expertise:** in addition to their knowledge of animal health and welfare, veterinarians have a broad, general knowledge of infectious diseases and their spread, a combination that is now very important. This allows the veterinarian to play an important role in assessing information on virus spread by humans and animals and in providing advice on safe behaviour. Veterinary input into the debate on the relationship between human and animal health is also important. It is linked to a broader discussion about the extent to which we as a veterinary profession really support the One Health idea. How strictly or broadly do we see our role in protecting animals, people and ecosystems?

These three steps may not immediately solve all problems, but it can provide a starting point to make careful and well-informed assessments and choices. It enables to address questions on concerns about the "here and now", but also with an eye to "there and in the future". Precisely that is essential in this coronavirus pandemic and enables the veterinarian to continue playing his or her role to the well-being of people and animals.