

ETHICS AND EQUINE MEDICINE: Curse, Pipedream, or Opportunity?

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No conflicts
of interest
to declare

Farcus

by David Weisglass
Gordon Coulthart



**"What conflict of interest?!
I work here in my spare time."**

Relevance to Clinical Practice

Ethical conduct benefits both practicing veterinarians and the veterinary profession



The Outline

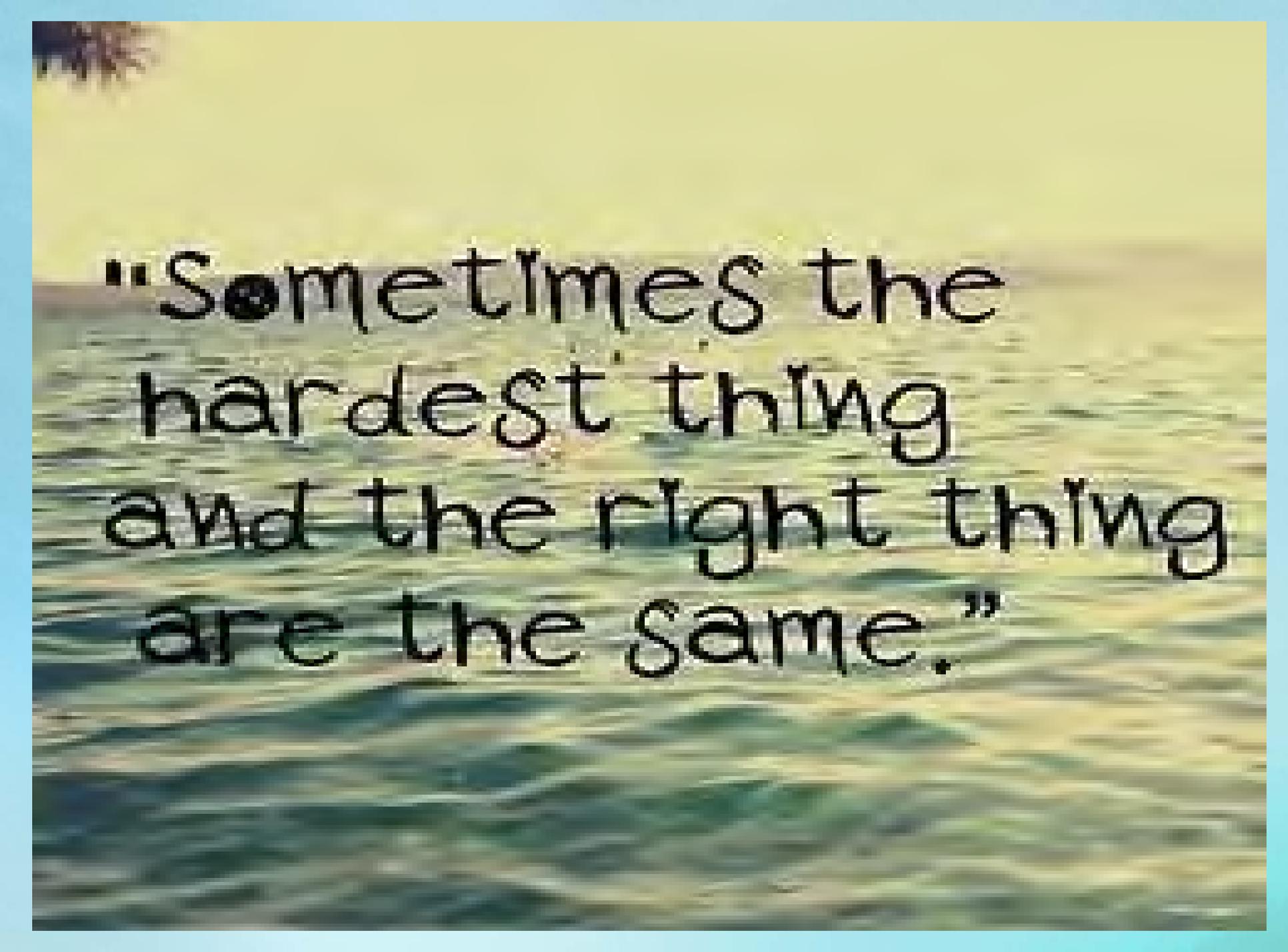
- What are Ethics?
- Why are Ethics Important?
- Characteristics of Ethical Behavior
- Why are Ethical Discussions Full of Controversy?
- The Players in Ethical Discussions About Horses
 - Veterinarians
 - Organizations
 - Clients
 - Society
 - Horses
- Relevant Ethical Questions
- Summary



What are Ethics?

- A philosophical endeavor
- Simply stated, ethics concerns itself with right and wrong behavior

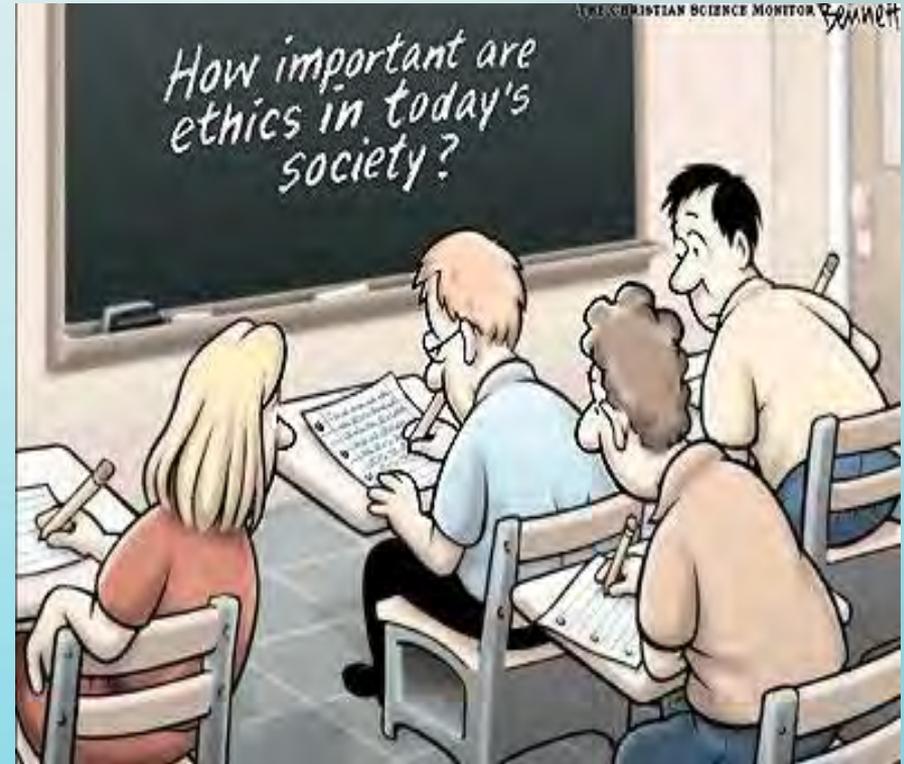
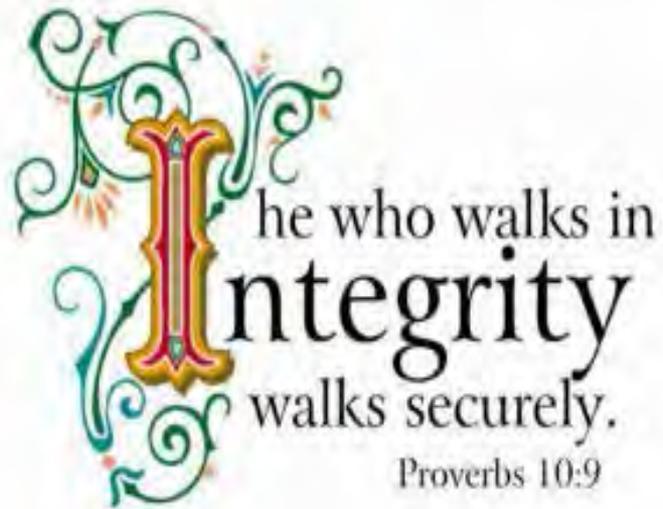


A photograph of a sunset over the ocean. The sky is a mix of yellow, orange, and light blue, with a few wispy clouds. The water is dark blue with white-capped waves. The quote is written in a black, handwritten-style font, centered on the image.

"Sometimes the
hardest thing
and the right thing
are the same."

To Preserve Professional Integrity

To Protect the Public



Why Ethics?

Preserving Professional Integrity

Ethical standards

Build trust

- Maintain the veterinarian-client bond
- Are arguably the most important determinant of the success of any relationship

Define conduct

- Encourage people to seek professional services
- Provide confidence about
 - Reliability
 - Actions

Ethical Conduct is One of the Most Powerful Influences On the Perceptions of Professions

HIGHLY REGARDED

- Nurses
- Veterinarians
- Law Enforcement
- Teachers



Ethical Conduct is One of the Most Powerful Influences On the Public's Perceptions of Professions

NOT HIGHLY REGARDED

- Lawyers
- Car Salesmen
- US Congress



In general, individuals whose work requires them to respond to the needs of other people tend to rate very highly in public opinion surveys, whereas those that are seen as being in it for their own benefit tend not to fare well

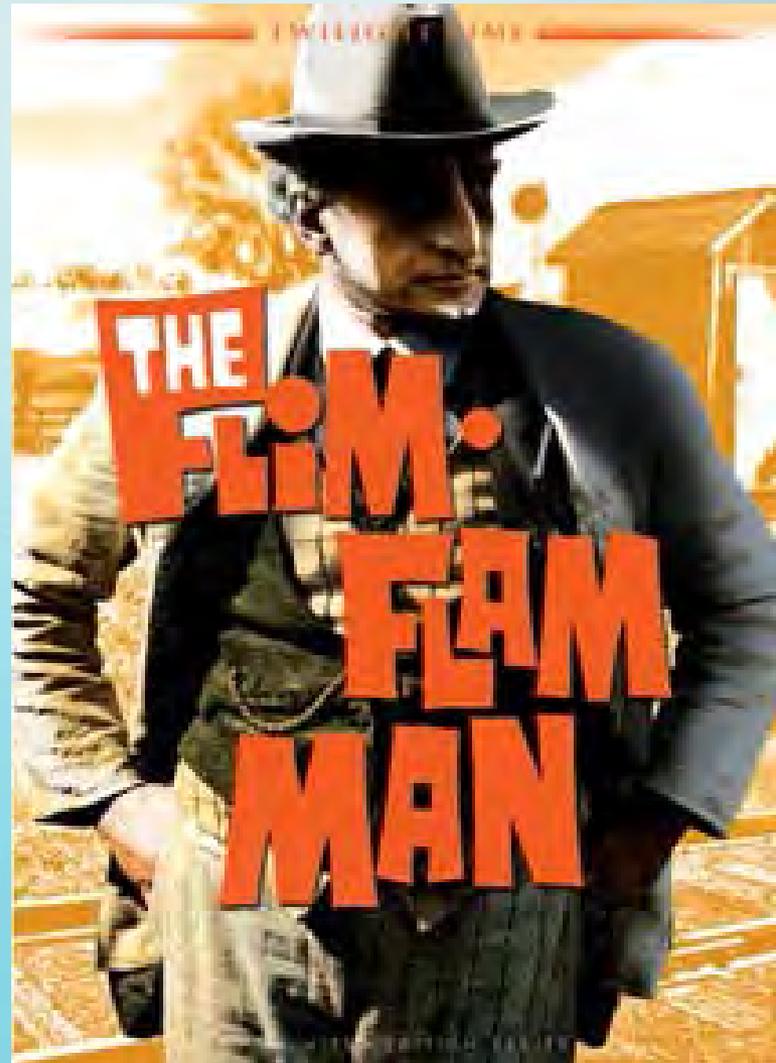


“HORSE DOCTORING” WAS ONCE A TERM OF
OPPROBRIUM

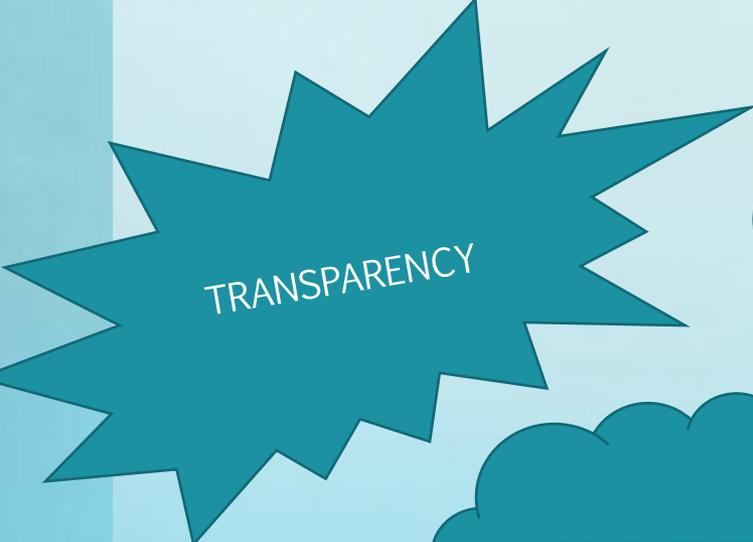


Protecting the Public

- The public lacks training and expertise, and it can be easily exploited
- Adherence to professional ethical codes help reassure the public that it is not being taken advantage of



Characteristics of Ethical Behavior



TRANSPARENCY



ACCOUNTABILITY



RESPECTFULNESS



OBJECTIVITY



CONFIDENTIALITY



INTEGRITY



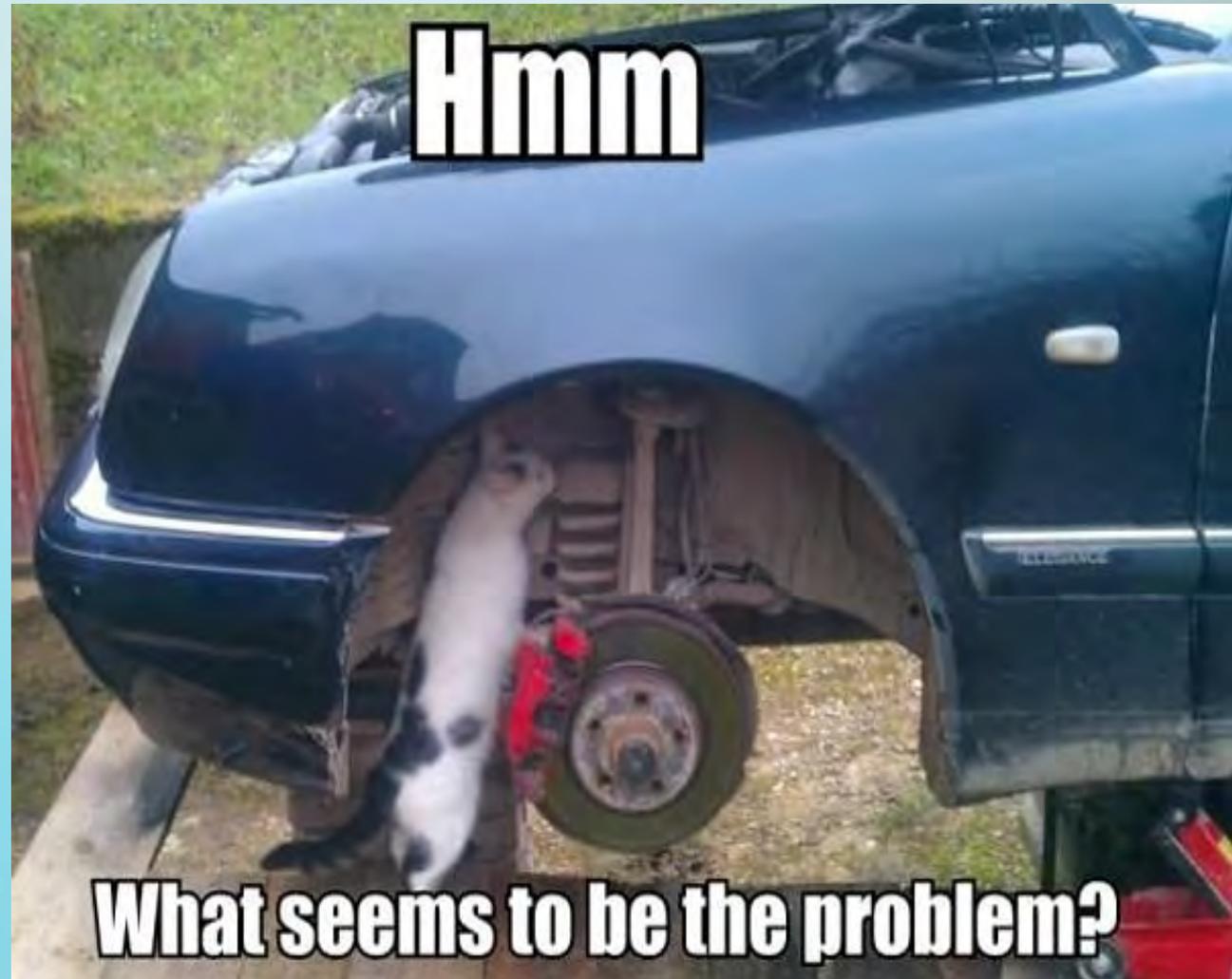
HONESTY



OBEDIENCE TO
THE LAW

If we agree that...

- Equine veterinarians should behave ethically
- The public should be protected



I KNOW I CAN FIND
THE ANSWER



Everyone Has His or Her Own Ethics



ETHICS IS NOT
OBJECTIVE

GARY COOPER

PATRICIA
NEAL

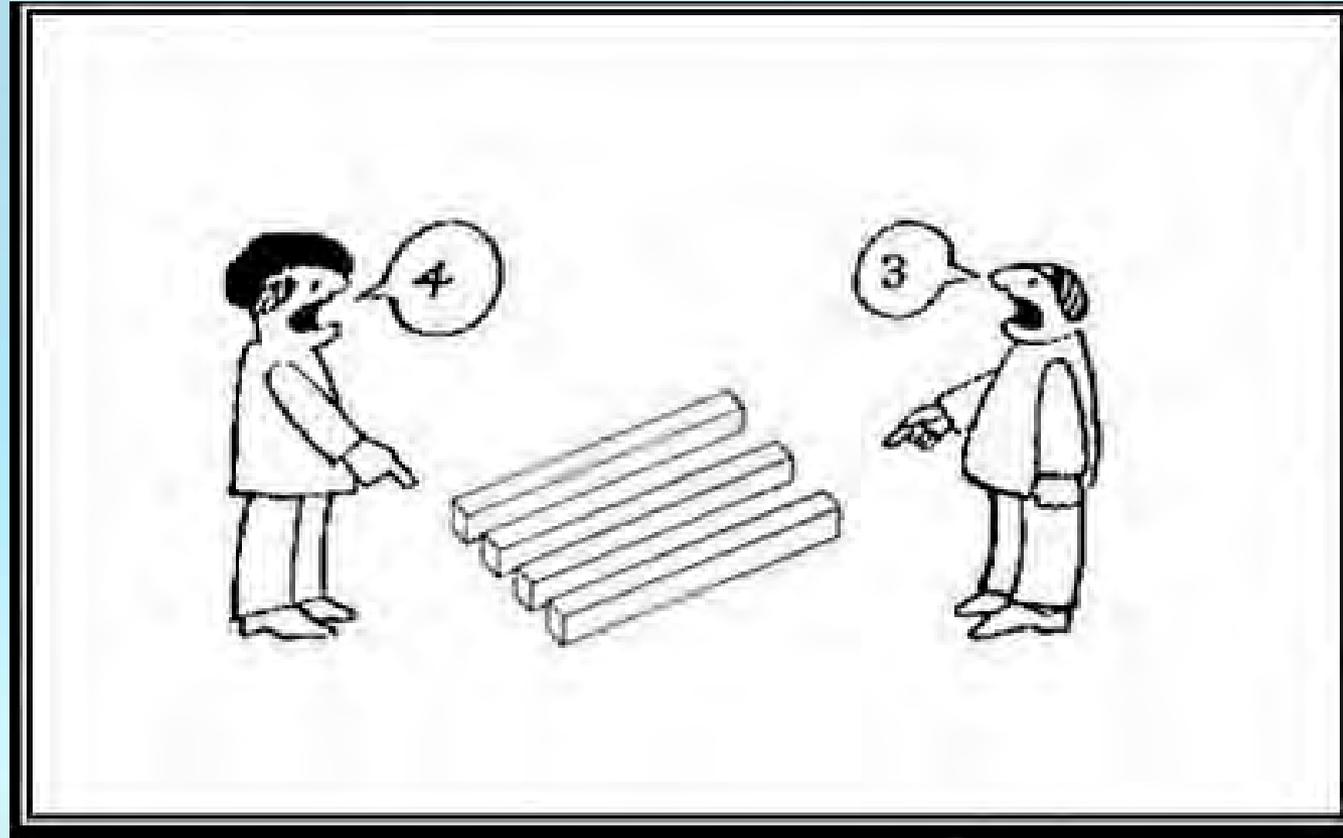
Everyone Has His or Her Own Ethics

One person's moral and ethical judgments are often different from another's



Everyone Has His or Her Own Ethics

Individuals may disagree about a certain moral or ethical situation, even if they share many of the same morals and ethics



Some Ethics Are Better Than Others

Practices that are

- Fairer
- More honest
- Kinder
- More considerate

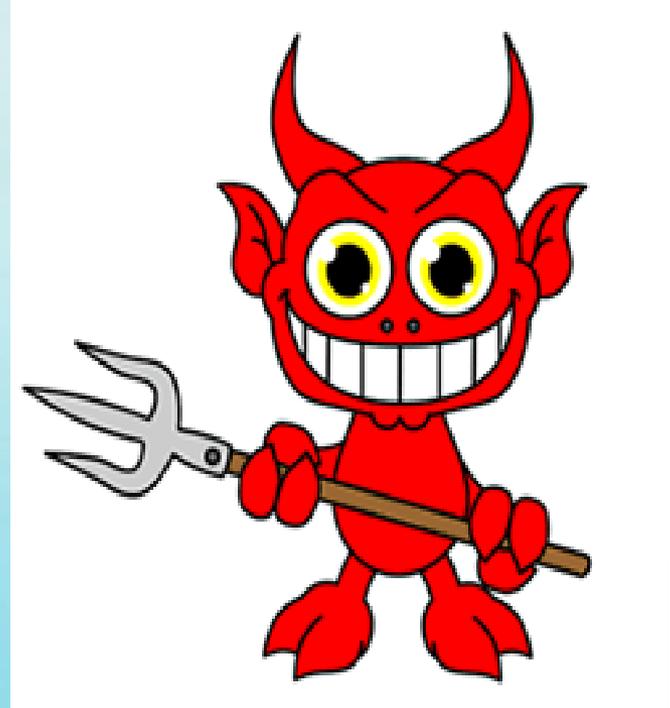
are likely to be considered
more ethical than ...



Some Ethics Are Better Than Others

...practices that are

- Unfair
- Dishonest
- Cruel
- Thoughtless



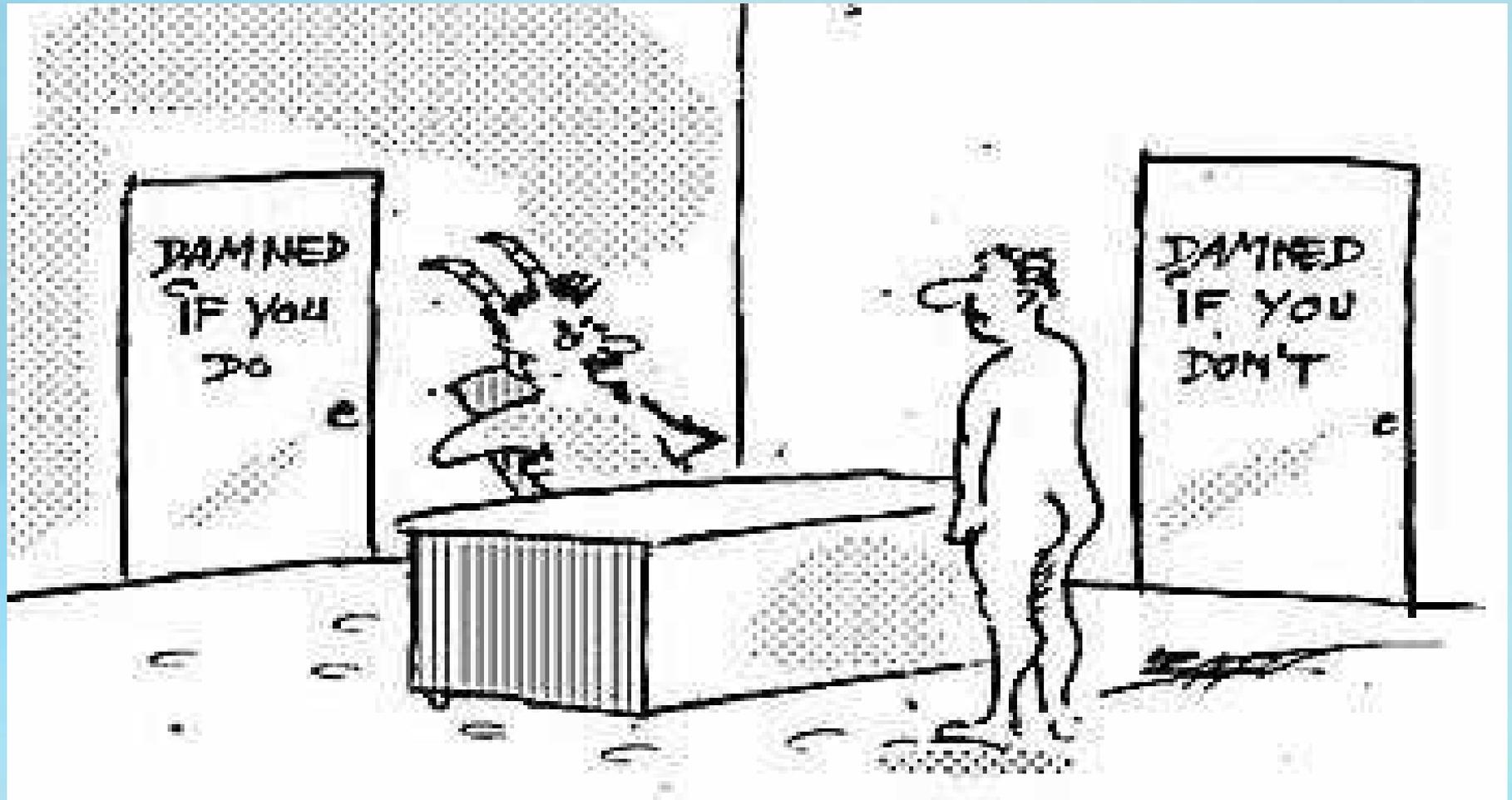
BETTER ETHICS = BETTER PERCEPTION = TRUST

The Ethical Players

- Ethics is not conducted in a vacuum
- There are ethical considerations and consequences for all involved in the VCPR



Ethical Responsibilities to Self

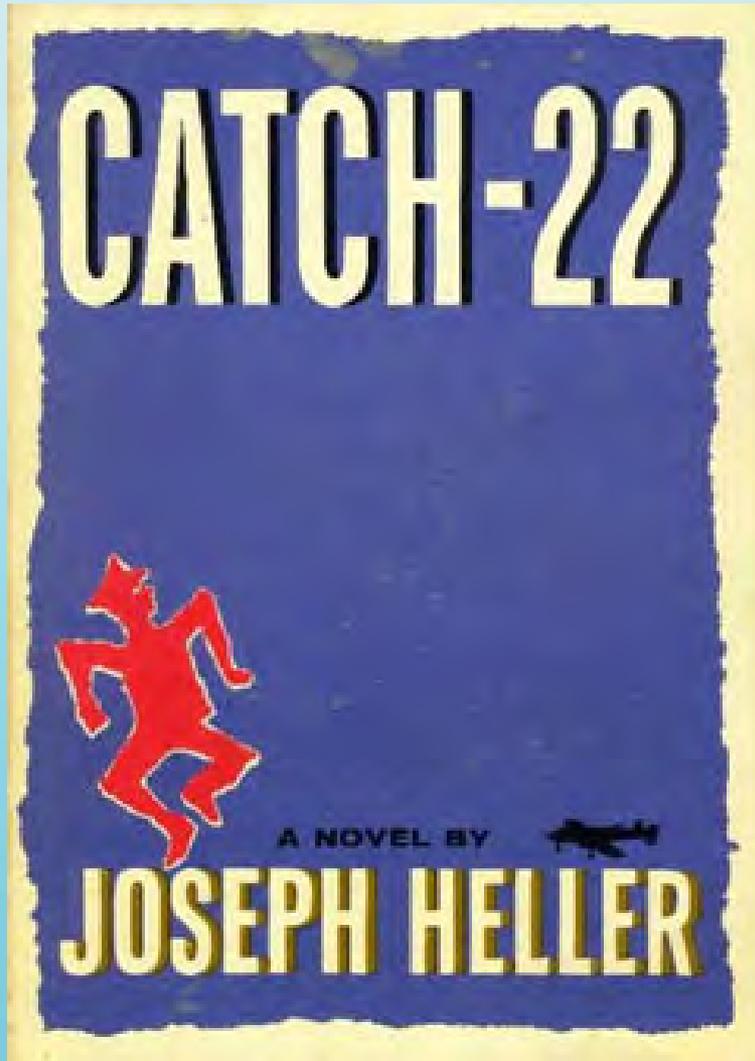


" We never forget you have a choice. "

Ethical Responsibilities to Self

- Veterinary Medicine is a business
- Ethics can be used to justify putting responsibilities to self above all others
 - Horse
 - Society
 - Client
- Ethics that are overly self-interested tend to foster irresponsible, dishonest, and unethical conduct

Ethical responsibilities to Self



- “From now on I’m thinking only of me.”
- “But, Yossarian, suppose everyone felt that way.” Major Danby replied. (Intellectual college professor)
- “Then,” said Yossarian, “I’d certainly be a damned fool to feel any other way, wouldn’t I?”

Ethical Responsibilities to Self

- If it were easy to be ethical, there'd be no reason to have ethics discussions
- There are times when telling the truth, or refusing to perform a procedure may result in the loss of a client

A woman with short brown hair is shown from the chest up, holding a black mobile phone to her ear. She has a very angry and frustrated expression, with her mouth wide open as if shouting. The background is dark.

I need that horse to show this weekend!

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white lab coat over blue scrubs, has a stethoscope around her neck. She is looking down with a stressed and weary expression, her hand resting against her forehead.

This isn't good for the horse.

Ethical Responsibilities to Self

- The acid test of one's commitment to ethics is whether he or she will do the right thing even if it is not necessarily in his or her immediate best interest to do so



**CAN YOU PASS
THE ACID TEST ?**



has fully earned this acid test diploma:

Ethical Responsibilities to Society

- Being socially responsible means that an individual or organization has responsibilities that lie beyond their own immediate self-interest
- While the goal of a business may be to maximize profits, social responsibilities imply that business activities should also benefit society at large and not be solely devoted to the bottom line



Ethical Responsibilities to Society

The success of a veterinary endeavor should be (and is) determined not only by how much money it makes, but also by how many horses and people it helps



Ethical Responsibilities to Society

- Actions that have a social conscience benefit the veterinary profession in general by generating good will and positive press
- They also benefit the individuals who participate in such endeavors



Ethical Responsibilities to Society

- Professional organizations such as the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP) also maintain ethical codes to inform society of its ethical principles



Ethical Responsibilities to Society

Professional Organizations Do Have Some Power and Authority

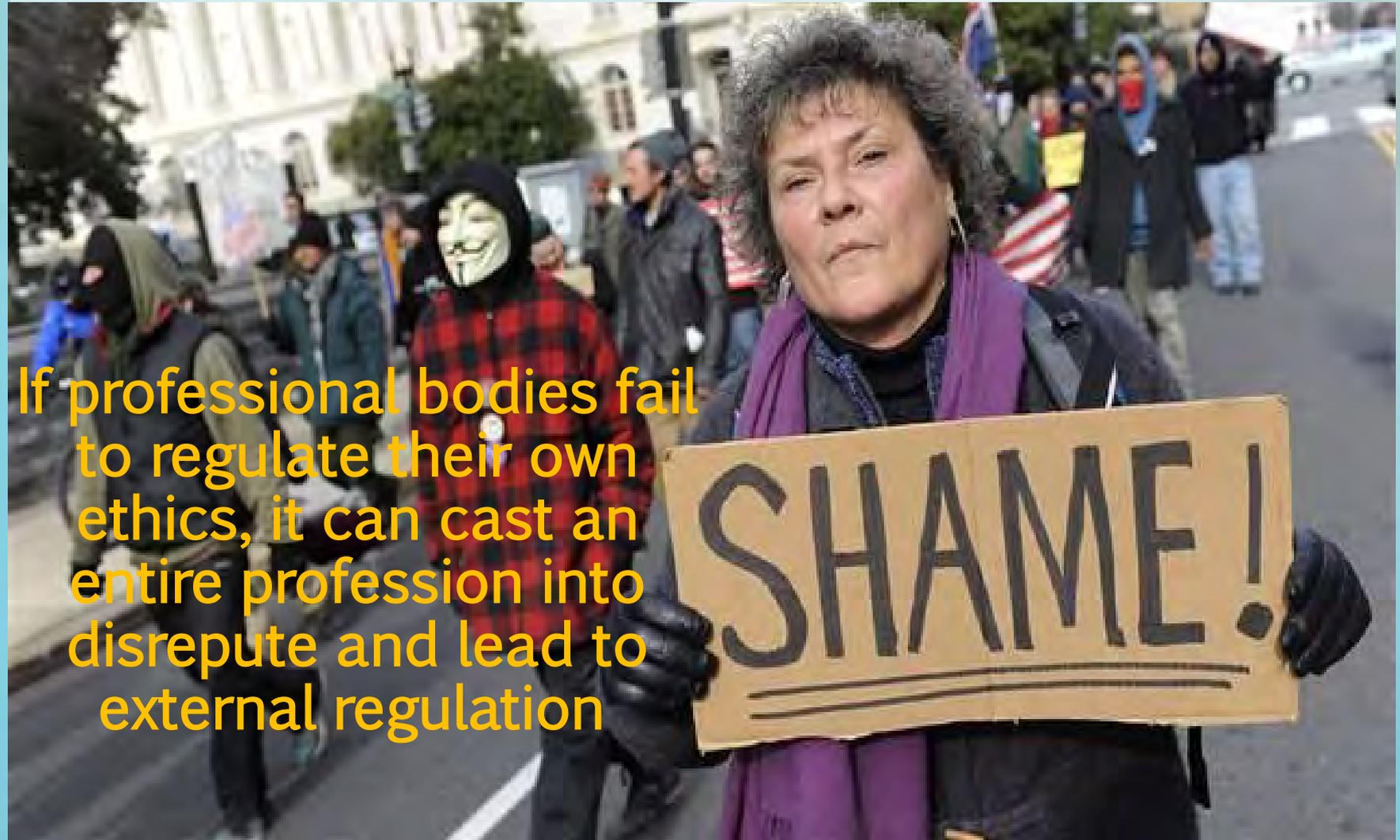
- If individual members fail to meet standards propounded by the organization, membership can be revoked
- Disciplinary action is intended to protect professionals who act with conscience from being undermined commercially by those who have fewer ethical qualms

Ethical Responsibilities to Society

- Unfortunately, when professional bodies regulate their own ethics, there are opportunities for such bodies to become self-serving
- They may fail to follow their own ethical code when dealing with renegade members in response to societal pressures



Social Responsibilities



If professional bodies fail to regulate their own ethics, it can cast an entire profession into disrepute and lead to external regulation



RESPONSIBILITY

No single drop of water thinks it is responsible for the flood.

It is as important for professional organizations to act as ethically and responsibly as it is for its individual members



Ethics and the Client

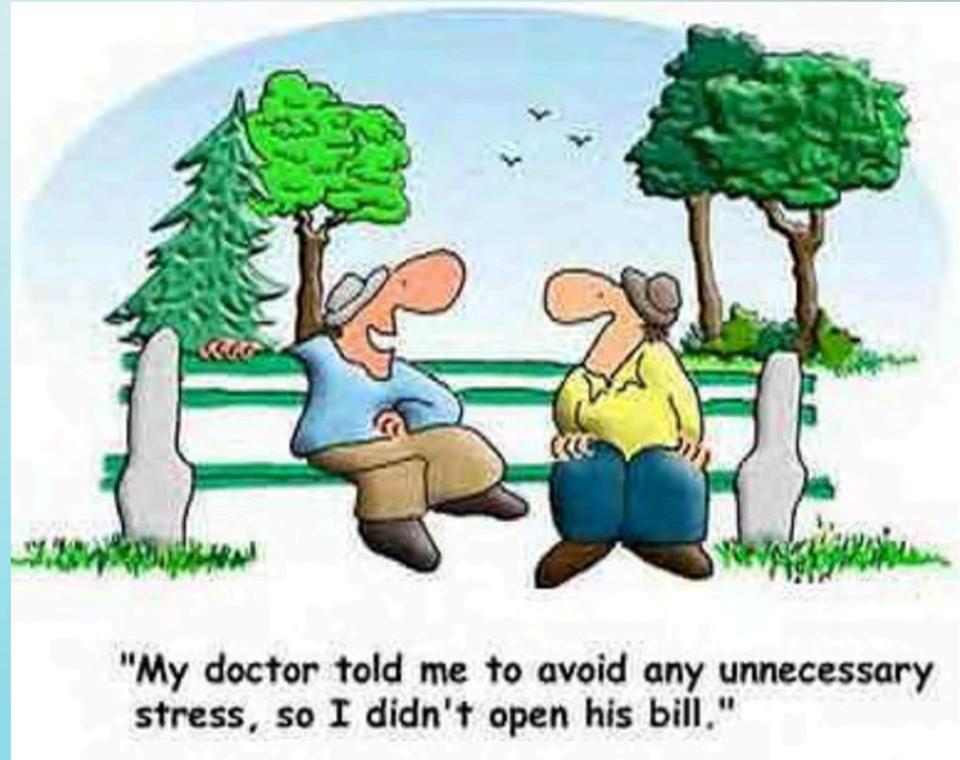
- Veterinary medicine differs from human medicine in that the client and the patient are not the same individual (or species)



"Phil, could I speak to you for a moment, not as your doctor but as your horse?"

Ethics and the Client

- The veterinarian's role with the client and his or her equine patient is most closely akin to the role of the pediatrician
 - Patient is the child
 - Has to deal with the parent concerning matters of treatment and payment
 - The veterinarian usually does not have the force of law to take or prevent action



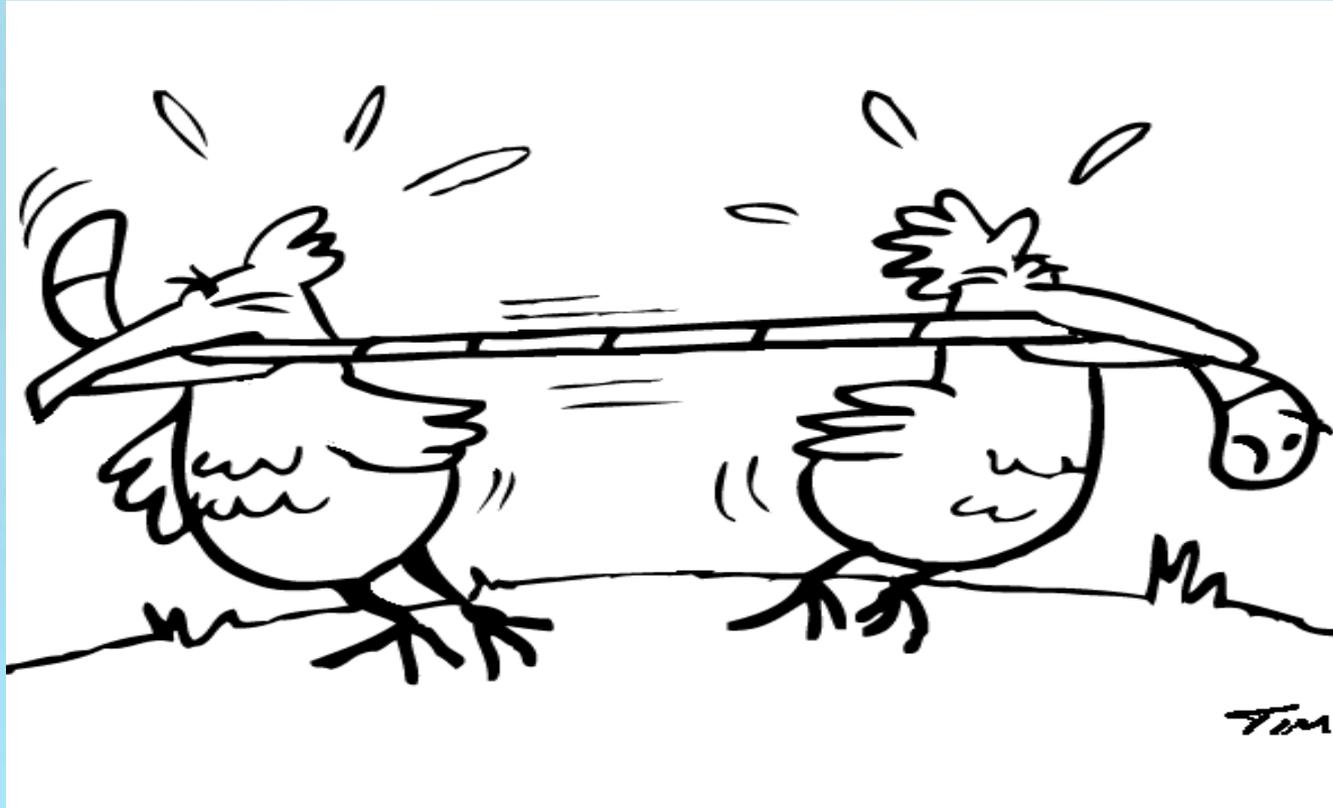
Ethics and the Client

Client wishes and the veterinarian's ethics can conflict

- Euthanasia on demand
- Demand for treatments or therapies to enhance performance that are against association rules



Ethics and the Client



COMPETING INTERESTS MAY HAVE VETERINARIAN
AND CLIENT PULLING IN OPPOSITE DIRECTIONS

A teal-colored starburst shape with multiple sharp points, containing white text.

RISK OF INJURY
VS.
WINNING RACE

A teal-colored starburst shape with multiple sharp points, containing white text.

HORSE'S HEALTH
VS.
GETTING TO THE
NEXT SHOW

Ethics and the Client

- The veterinarian's ethical responsibility to self, as well as the responsibility to the horse, should supersede client demands



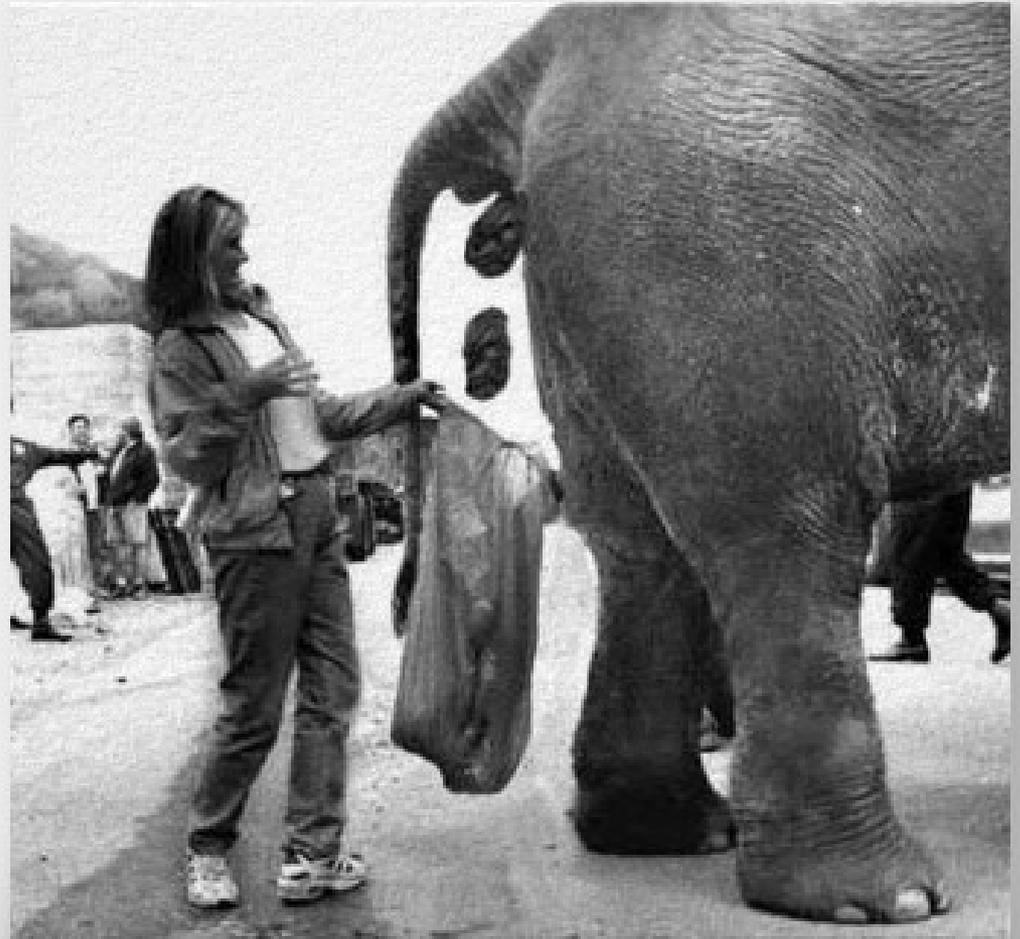
Doing What the Client Wants May Not Be in Anyone's Best Interest

- May increase client satisfaction (at least short term)
- Associated with *worse* health outcomes in human medicine
- Associated with greater costs



Ethics and the Client

- It is possible to get left holding the bag
- If something goes wrong, “The client asked me to do it,” is *not* an acceptable legal defense



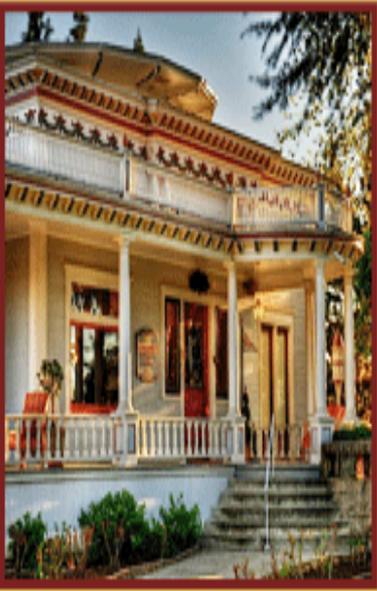


The law generally assumes that the veterinarian's primary duty is to the animal and not to the client

Client's can make it very difficult for a veterinarian to act only in the best interests of the horse



in your best
INTEREST
medical clinic, inc.



Ethics and the Client

- Aesculapian authority
 - The place of honor traditionally given to doctors in society
 - A powerful tool for helping clients do the right thing
 - Can be greatly diminished if the veterinarian fails to act ethically



Aesclepius (in a lighter moment)

Societal Interest in Horses



- Society has no special obligation to veterinarians
- Societal concerns mostly center around equine welfare
- Societal concerns for equine welfare appear to be increasing

Societal Interest in Horses

- “Soring” and Tennessee Walking Horses



Societal Interest in Horses



PREVENTION OF EQUINE CRUELTY
ACT OF 2008, AND THE ANIMAL
CRUELTY STATISTICS ACT OF 2008

UNITED STATES CONGRESS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY, SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME,
TERRORISM AND HOMELAND SECURITY

- Federal Legislation Banning Horse Slaughter
 - Killing of horses abhorrent to some
 - Concerns about humane transport
 - Introduced over objections of AVMA and AAEP

Societal Interest in Horses

- PMU Industry
 - Societal Pressure resulted in
 - Improved regulation and a code of ethics
 - More marketable foals



Societal Interest in Horses



NYC's horses are the biggest losers.

Hundreds of horses suffer, lugging carriages through the city's hectic, noisy streets. Routine accidents leave horses and people injured. **Join me in urging Speaker Quinn to stop blocking a program to phase out horse-drawn carriages,** which many cities did long ago. Help clean up and modernize Manhattan by visiting PETA.org.

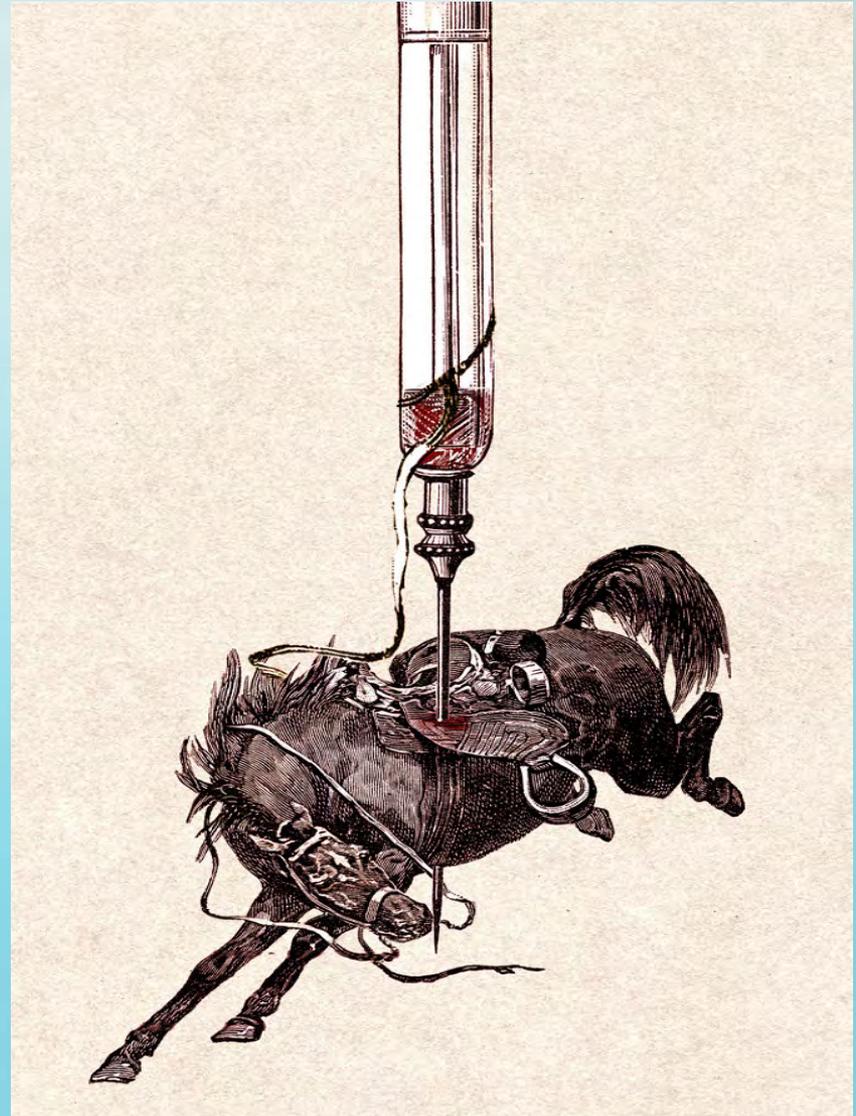


JILLIANMICHAELS for **PETA**

- Carriage Horses in Urban Environments
 - Some feel that horses are picturesque, quaint, and romantic
 - Others see a form of abuse
 - Assurances of ethical treatment might help allay concerns

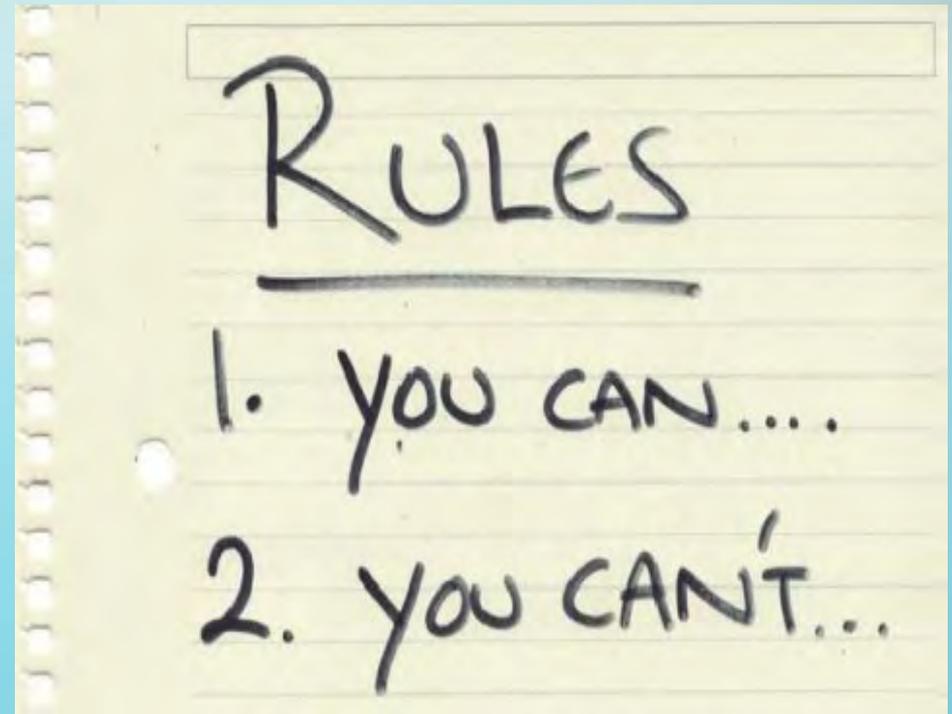
Societal Interest in Horses

- Horse Racing
 - Has come under intense scrutiny
 - Lack of concern for welfare often cited as a reason for decline in popularity
 - Veterinarians implicated



Society and Veterinarians

- Society regulates the practice of veterinary medicine based on:
 - Perceptions that veterinary medicine is a field of “special knowledge”
 - How well veterinary medicine is filling its obligations to horses, horse owners, and society
 - Public demand

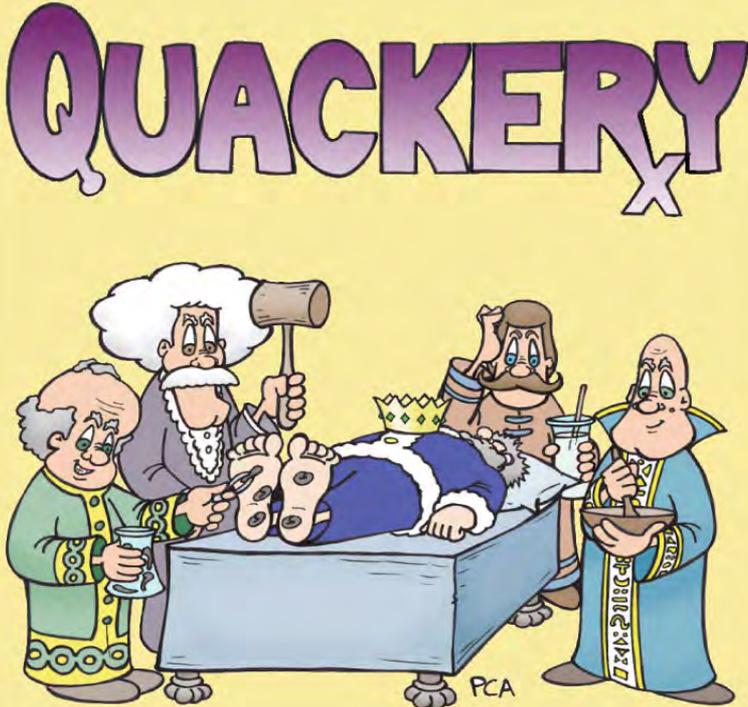


The mere holding of a veterinary license does not guarantee that the practice of veterinary medicine will retain its protected status



Society and Veterinarians

- Why Should Society Protect Veterinarians?
- Others claims special knowledge
 - Lay Dentists
 - Lay “Alternative” Practitioners
 - Acupuncture
 - Massage Therapists
 - Farriers
 - Chiropractors
 - Homeopaths
 - Etc., etc., etc....



QUACKERY_X

The Game of Medieval Medicine

2 - 4 players
Ages:
10 and up

Playing time:
30 to 60
minutes

TG TANGENT GAMES
Taking games in a new direction

PCA

Society and Veterinarians

- Society makes laws regulating veterinary medicine
- Laws change due to changes in contexts in which they were set
 - Level of technology
 - Culture
 - Economy
 - Beliefs
 - Change in public interests



HELLO
my name is

Opportunity

ETHICAL STANDARDS AND CONDUCT OFFER ONE OPPORTUNITY FOR VETERINARIANS TO DISTINGUISH THEMSELVES FROM COMPETING SERVICE PROVIDERS

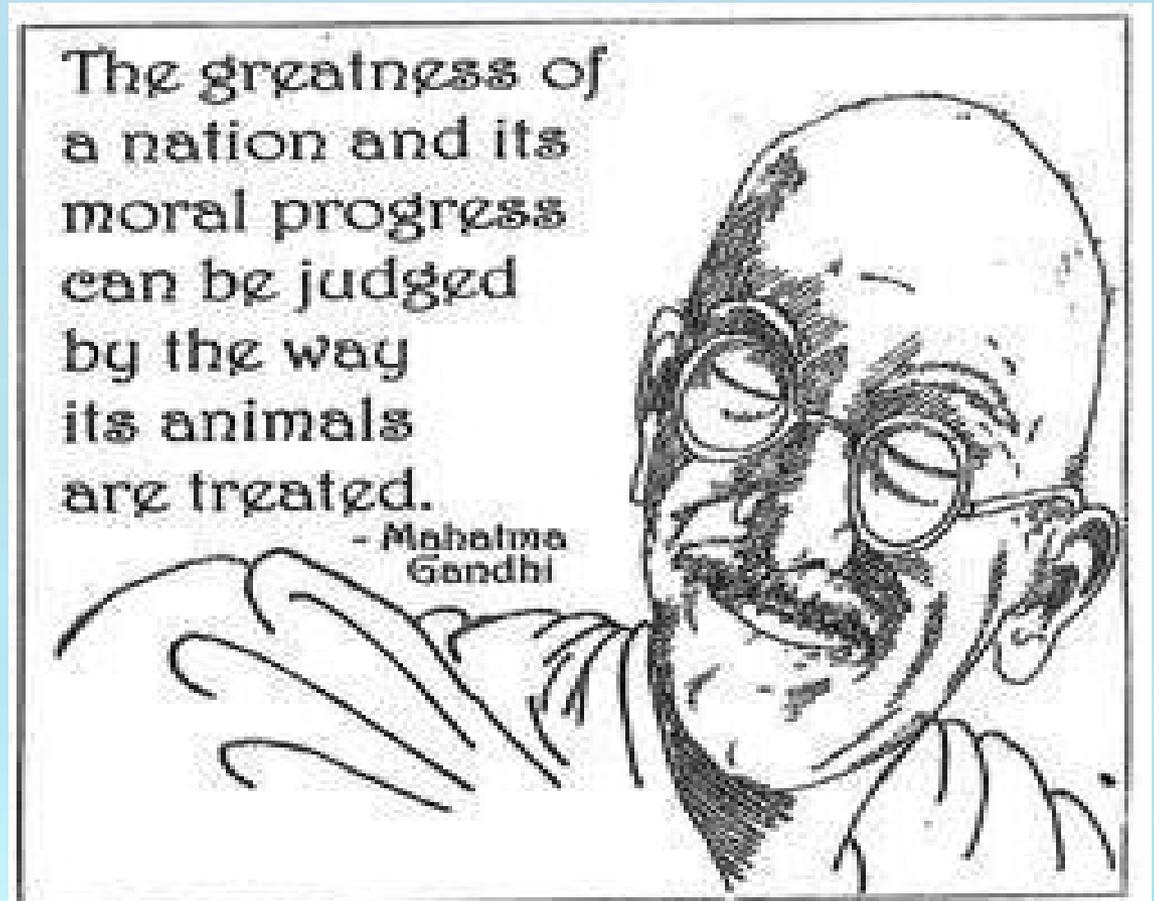
Client Obligations to Veterinarians

Something of a One-Way Street

- Clients don't always pay bills
- Clients don't always tell the truth about their horses
- People don't have to use veterinarians



In their own interest, veterinarians would be well served to seek out clients who act ethically and who have the best interest of their horses in mind



Ethical Responsibilities to the Horse

- Ideally, ethical responsibilities of horse owners, society, and veterinarians should mirror each other, all working together for the good of the horse



Reality



Demands for increased performance may not be in the best interest of the horse's health



Societal
Concerns
About Equine
Welfare May
Sometimes be
Misguided



- Ethical Conduct Places Veterinarians in the Best Position to Argue for the Welfare of the Horse
- It is to the Ultimate Advantage of Both the Horse and the Veterinary Profession that they Do So

Life is short...



...stop and smell the horses.

WARNING



**CHALLENGES
AHEAD**

People can readily obtain their own pharmaceutical products from on-line pharmacies, feed stores, and so forth. They can obtain virtually any substance they believe a horse needs.

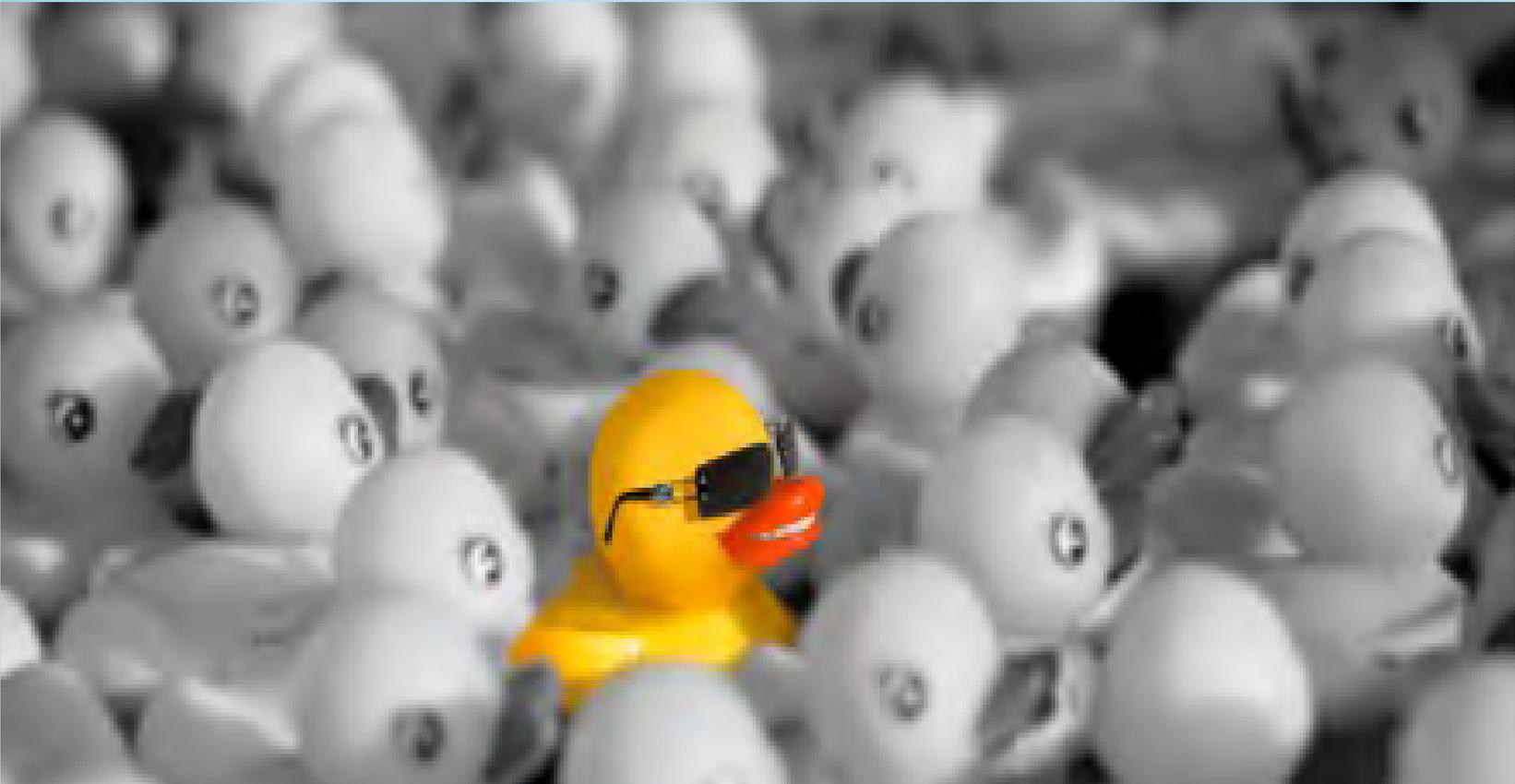
Veterinarians Have Typically Made a Living Selling Two Things

Services

Products



- Unfortunately, selling products carries an inherent ethical conflict
- Human medicine has largely avoided that conflict by outsourcing to pharmacies



The only thing that veterinarians have that is unique is their special knowledge

Individual Veterinarians Cannot Compete with Large Firms

- Products Do Not Differ With Vendors
- The Only Difference is the Price
- Some States Require Veterinarians to Write Prescriptions on Request



The AVMA's *Principles of Veterinary Medical Ethics* recommends that veterinarians comply with their client's wishes and provide written prescriptions if the client prefers having the prescription filled elsewhere, assuming the existence of a veterinary-client-patient relationship

Veterinarians *Can* Ethically Sell Products

- Veterinarians have medications in stock and can provide medications immediately
- Veterinarians can answer questions, provide instructions for use, and demonstrate how to give medications
- Medications controlled by veterinarians have the assurance of having been handled properly



Fighting Fire with Fire by Offering Drugs on Demand is Unethical



When tempted to fight fire with fire, remember that the Fire Department usually uses water.

Concierge Medicine



How to ethically compete with non-veterinarian “experts” (in a variety of areas), many of whom state that they provide services about which veterinarians either do not know or do not care (e.g, care of the horse’s teeth), and a seemingly endless array of products and services

Competing “Experts”

- A variety of factors have led people to believe that many things are critical for the health and welfare of their horses



Your aging horse has changing nutritional needs — are you keeping up with them?

3 Supplements Your Senior Horse Shouldn't Be Without

Veterinarians are Uniquely Qualified

- Special Knowledge (Education)
- Scientific Research
- Ethics

Veterinarians are best suited to determine which products and services are in the best interest of the horse, and in the best interest of their clients' pocketbooks

That Advantage Goes Away if Veterinarians Try to Compete Against “Experts” on Their Turf

- Chiropractors have degrees in chiropractic
- “Dentists” are certified by their own academies
- Lasers, magnets, crystals, LED devices, etc., can all be applied by non-veterinarians

Veterinarians who compete with non-veterinarian providers based only on the service provided risk being viewed negatively

- “In it for the money,” especially if the products or services have no benefit
- “Turf protectors” if they cannot show why they should be performing the service



Ethical Veterinarians Should Focus on What is Best for the Horse

- Don't try to compete in areas in which veterinary medicine provides no special knowledge or training
- Client loyalty comes when clients recognize that their veterinarian tries to do the right thing for the horse(s), first and foremost



“If I don’t do it, somebody else will.”



FUTILITY

The journey of 1000 miles often ends with you being eaten by a bear

Futility Illusion

- There is no point in not doing something (e.g. giving a medication) because it won't prevent the substance from being given, and I'll lose the business



Three Problems

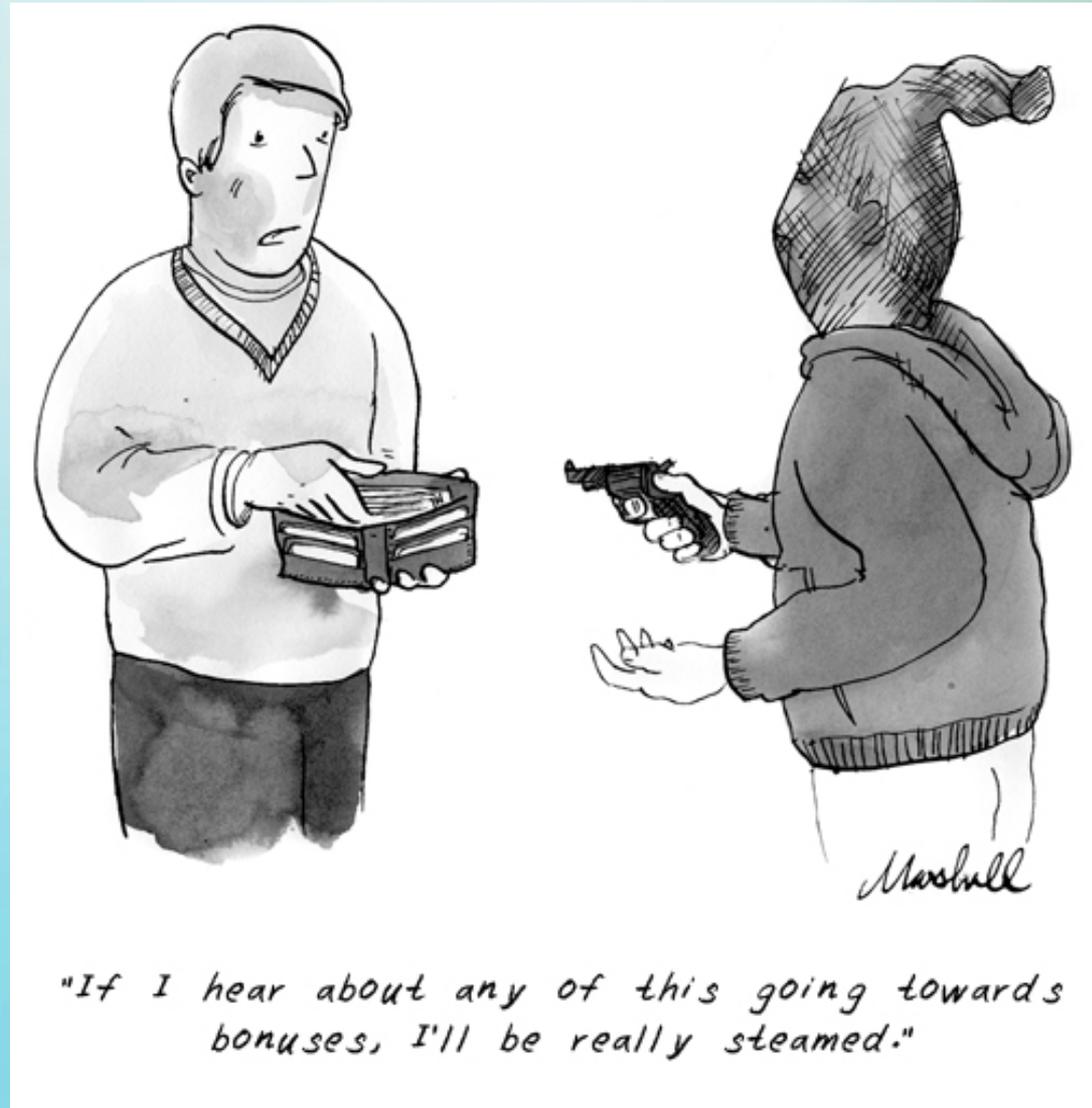
- The “If I don’t do it” argument is:
 - Faulty
 - Self-serving
 - Absurd



Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln,
how was the play?

Faulty

- If a group of young people were to come across a solitary old person, and one of the group decided that the old person should be robbed and could not be dissuaded, the rest of the group would not be blameless if they decided to participate in the robbery because it was going to happen anyway



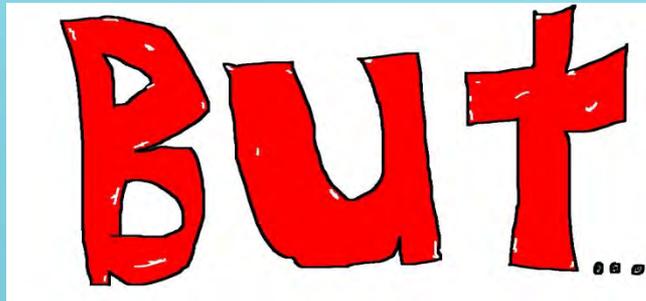
Self-Serving

ON THE ONE HAND

- It may be more humane if an unethical procedure is performed by a veterinarian
 - Anesthesia
 - Proper surgical technique
 - Post-op pain control

ON THE OTHER HAND

- The procedure being performed would still be unethical
- Its performance by veterinarians would only serve to perpetuate the unethical practice



BUT...

Absurd

- There are times when someone else will not do it



BELLA ARPAD

The Futility Illusion is Merely an Excuse for Not Acting in the Best Interest of the Horse

meal·y-mouthed (also meal·y-mouthed)

adjective

afraid to speak frankly or straightforwardly : *mealy-mouthed excuses.*

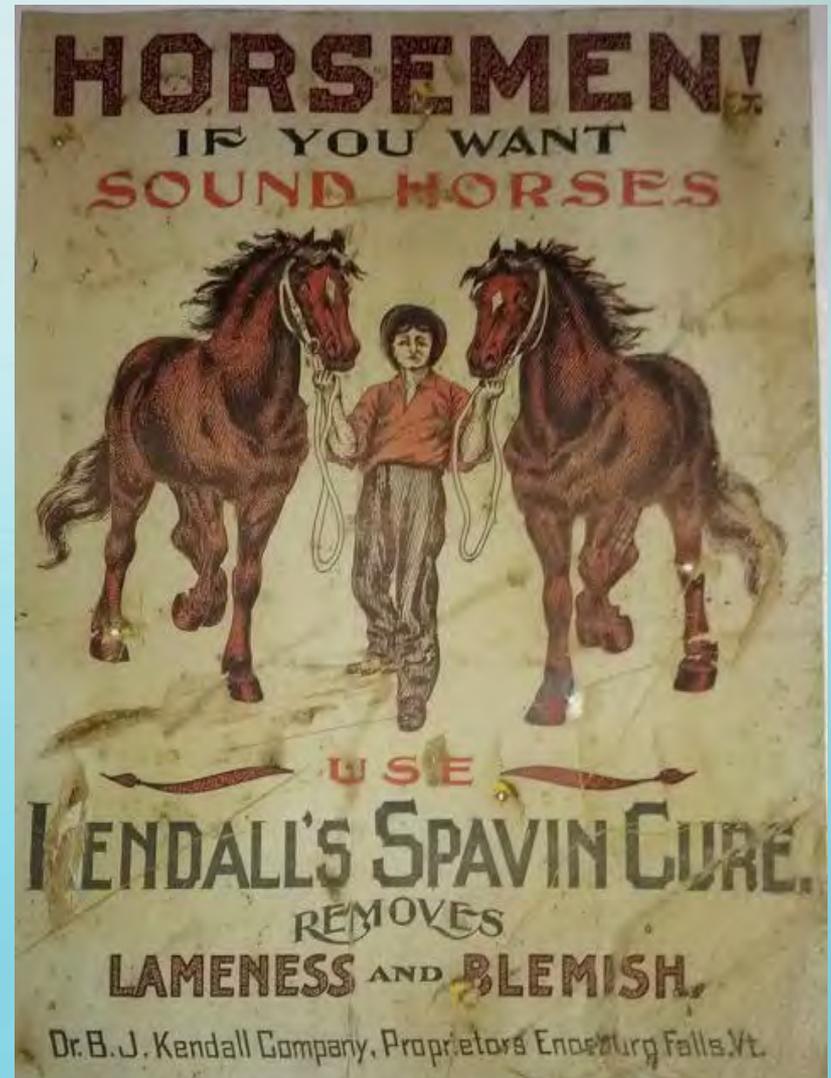


Mealy-mouthed porpoise

Providing treatments

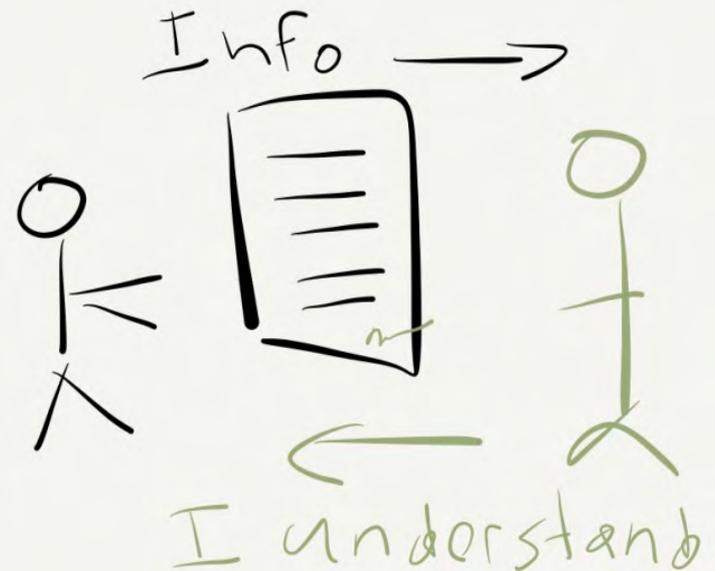
Ethics of Treatment

- Providing a therapy that is effective is an ethical imperative
- A therapy that is proven is more likely to be effective than an unproven therapy
- If therapies are unproven, there is an ethical obligation to demonstrate their effectiveness, or else they should be discarded



Informed Consent

- To be truly informed, clients must know
 - The nature of the decision/procedure
 - Reasonable alternatives to the proposed intervention
 - The relevant risks, benefits, costs, and uncertainties related to the treatment



Ethical Treatment Failures

- Not providing necessary information so that the client fully understands what is known about the potential risks and benefits of a treatment
- Promoting a therapy on the basis of criteria that are not relevant to the likelihood of a successful outcome for the horse
 - “New”
 - “Natural”
 - “Ancient”
 - Etc.

Ethics of Treatment

- Ethical treatment dilemmas can occur when a client's ideology differs from that of the veterinarian
 - Chronic, incurable disease, where the horse is suffering, but the client does not want to let go



Ethics of Treatment

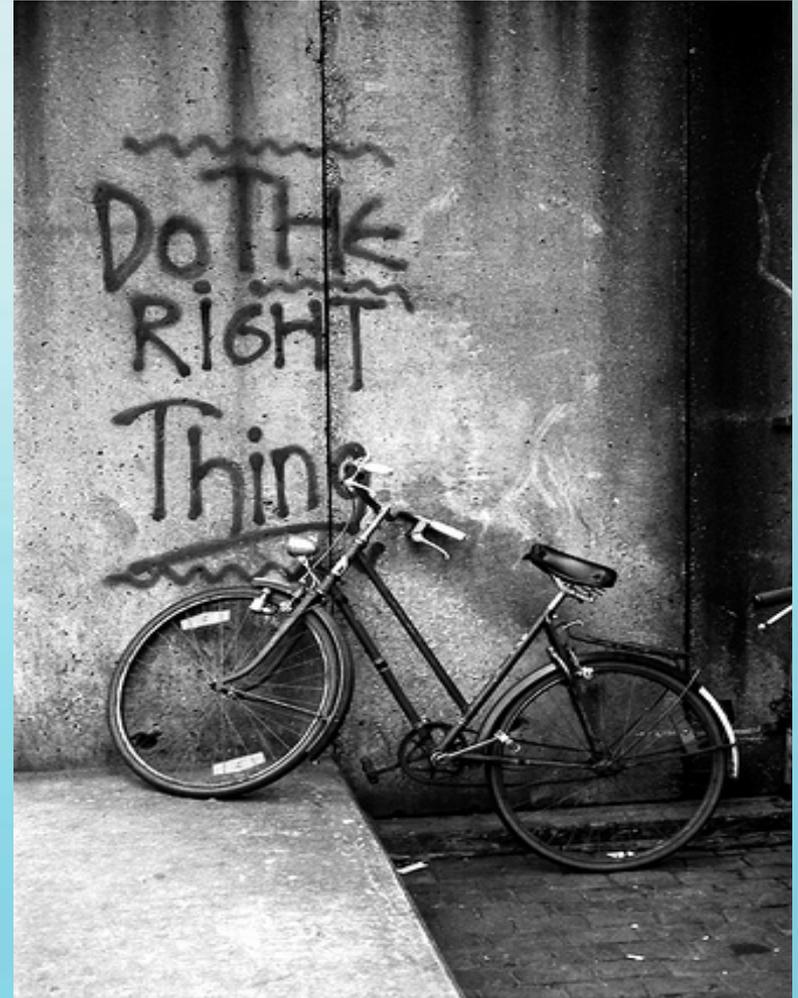
- The owner may be unwilling to let the horse go
- The owner may be willing to pay for myriad treatments



THE LAST DITCH

Ethics of Treatment

- Even so, the veterinarian should advocate for the animal, and prevent suffering
- Therapies that lack foundation
 - Prolong suffering
 - Waste client resources

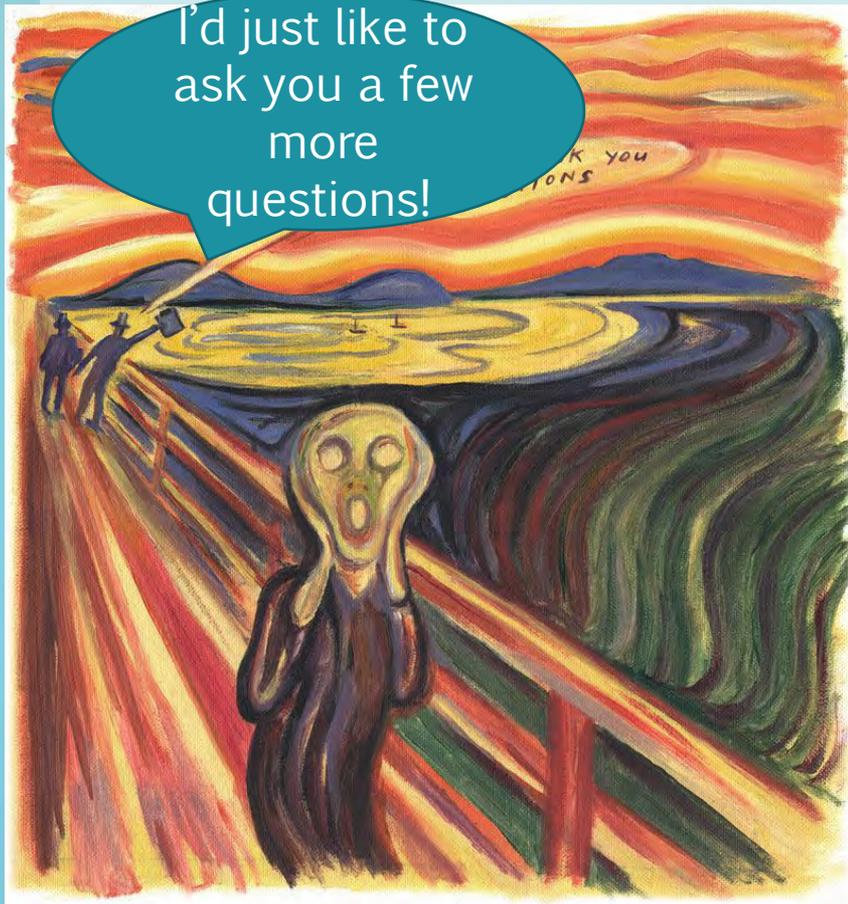


Ethics of Treatment

- If a therapy is harmless, but probably worthless
 - Articulate your reasons for not recommending the therapy
 - Stay involved with the horse and client



Ethics of Treatment



- **STAY INVOLVED**
- Help ensure that unscrupulous practitioners or the cost of new treatments do not financially bleed owners
- Keep the client focused on objective milestones that signify efficacy or lack thereof
- Show *you* care

Self-Policing

Self-Policing

- An ethical imperative for a profession
- Allows a profession to maintain control over the standards to which it is held
- A way to handle internal problems within a profession



Benefits of Self-Policing

Good alternative
to public
relations
campaigns to
repair damage



The
New York
Times

Breakdown

Death and disarray at America's racetracks
Racing Economics Collide With Veterinarians' Oath

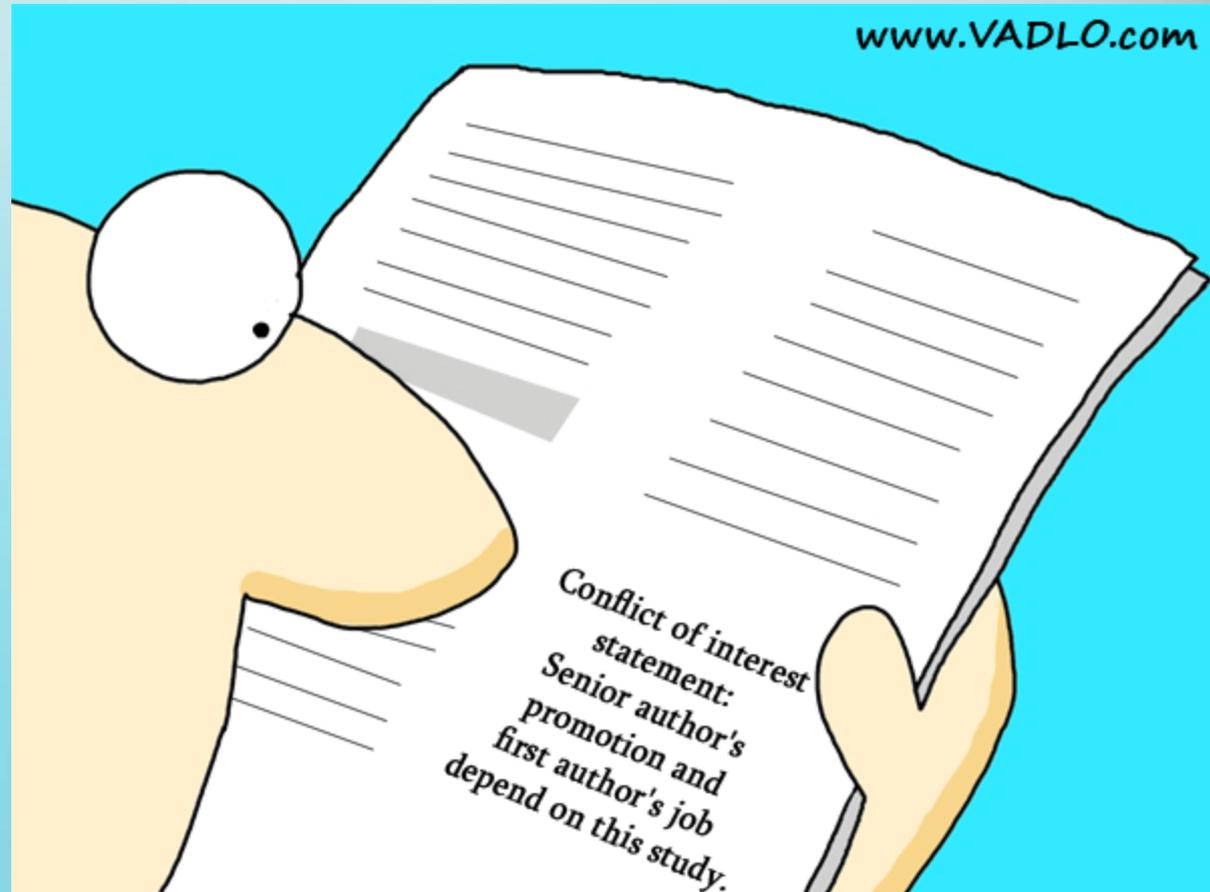
“Horse-racing veterinarians are both doctor and drugstore; the more drugs they prescribe, the more money they make.”



NEW YORK TIMES, Sept. 21, 2012

Why Does Self-Policing Fail?

- Inherent conflicts often override ethical considerations



Why Does Self-Policing Fail?

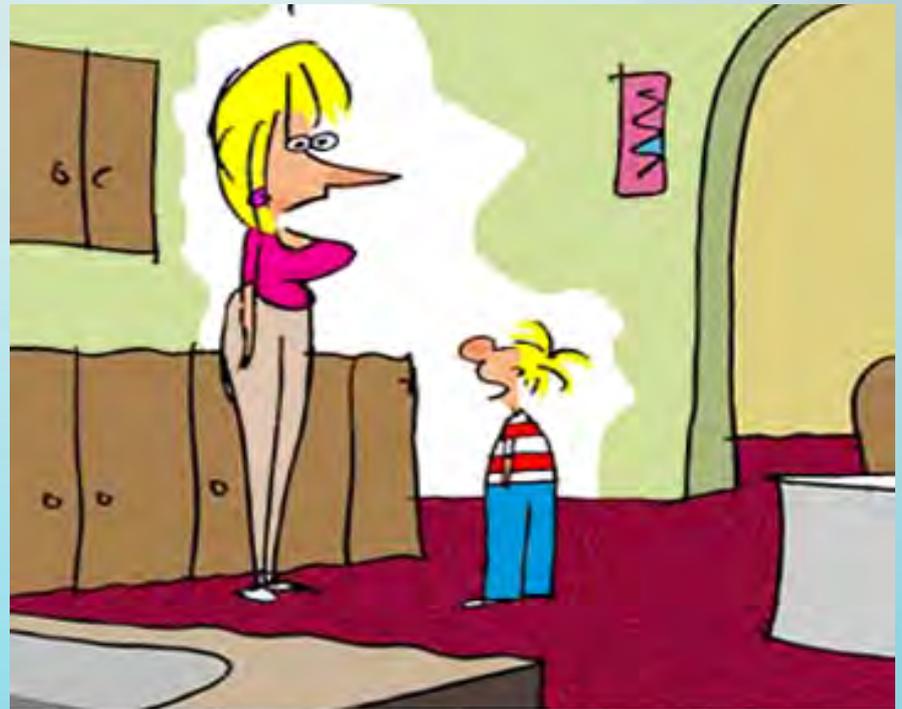
- Fear of bad publicity



"This really is an innovative approach, but I'm afraid we can't consider it. It's never been done before."

Why Does Self-Policing Fail?

- Fear of being ostracized
- Fear of being denied referrals



“Dad paid me \$10 not to tell you that he went to a tailgate party instead of work. For \$10, I’ll tell you where that party is.”



Alternative to Self-Policing

- Veterinary malpractice law is arguably the fastest growing segment of the law in the United States



Curse, Pipedream, or Opportunity?

UNIVERSAL presents

LON CHANEY in

"THE
MUMMY'S CURSE"

COPYRIGHT MCMXLIV BY UNIVERSAL PICTURES COMPANY, INC.

Curse?

- Some may feel that ethics constrains their “right” to practice in a manner of their choosing

It usually does



Even if veterinarians do not feel constrained by ethics the law and the legal system stands ready to provide a reminder



COLD TRUTH



Pipe Dream



Pipedream?

**Just the facts, mam.
Just the facts.**



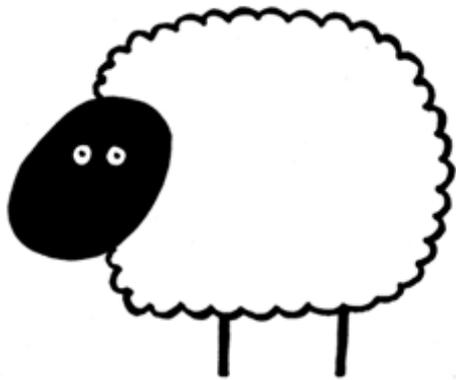
- It is probably a fact that not everyone will always act with the horse's best interest in mind
- In some cases, it may be economically disadvantageous to act in the horse's best interest

Pipedream?

- If ethics are a professional standard, then it should be possible for ethical veterinarians and organizations to lead the fight against unethical practices, and to reap the benefits



Pipedream?



Don't follow me
I haven't got a clue

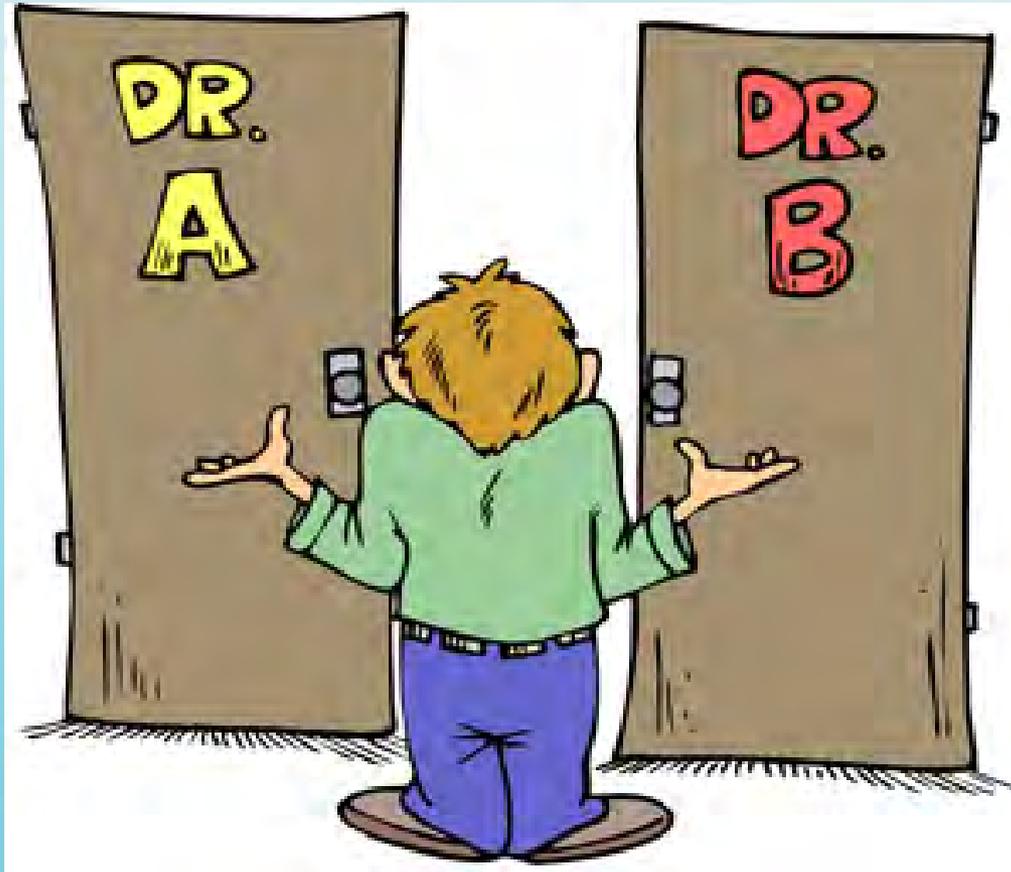
- Ultimately, unethical practices lead to societal complaints, which then lead to ways to redress those complaints
- The methods of redress may not be to the liking of professionals

Opportunity?

- Strict attention to ethics can separate professionals from other providers of equine health-related services



Opportunity?



- Ethics is a powerful driver of clients' perceptions of trust, honesty, and professionalism

Opportunity

If veterinarians are perceived as practicing for the benefit of the horse, their opinions and expertise are likely to be solicited

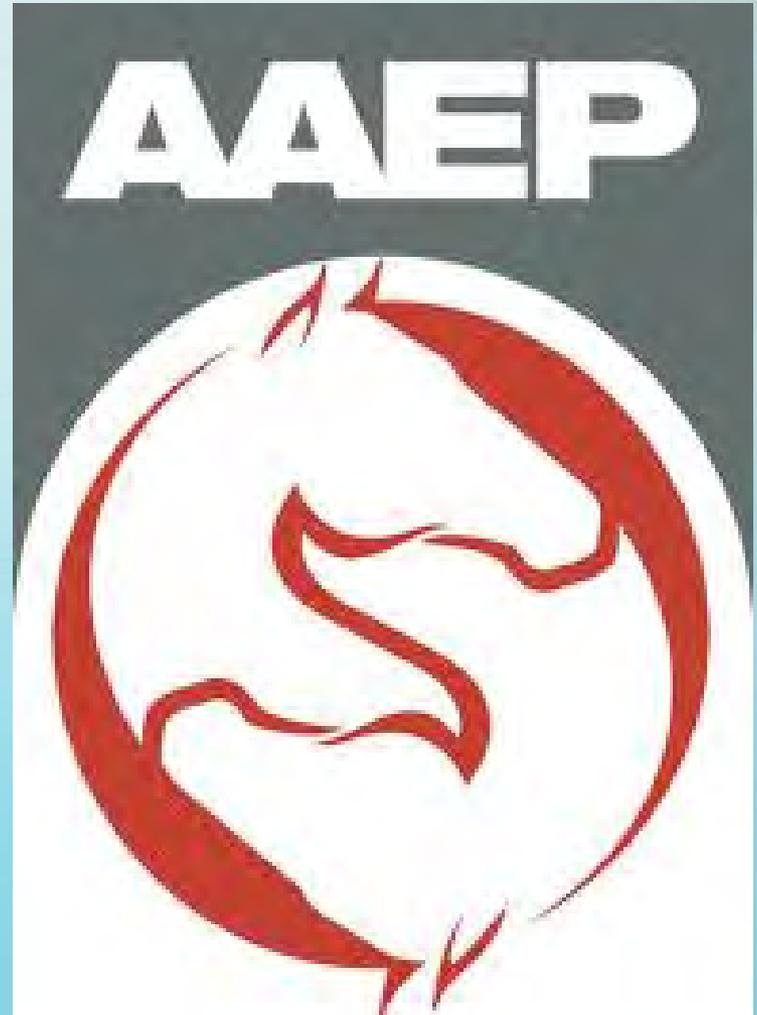


If veterinarians are perceived as being in it for themselves (for the money) they may be ignored, or worse, derided

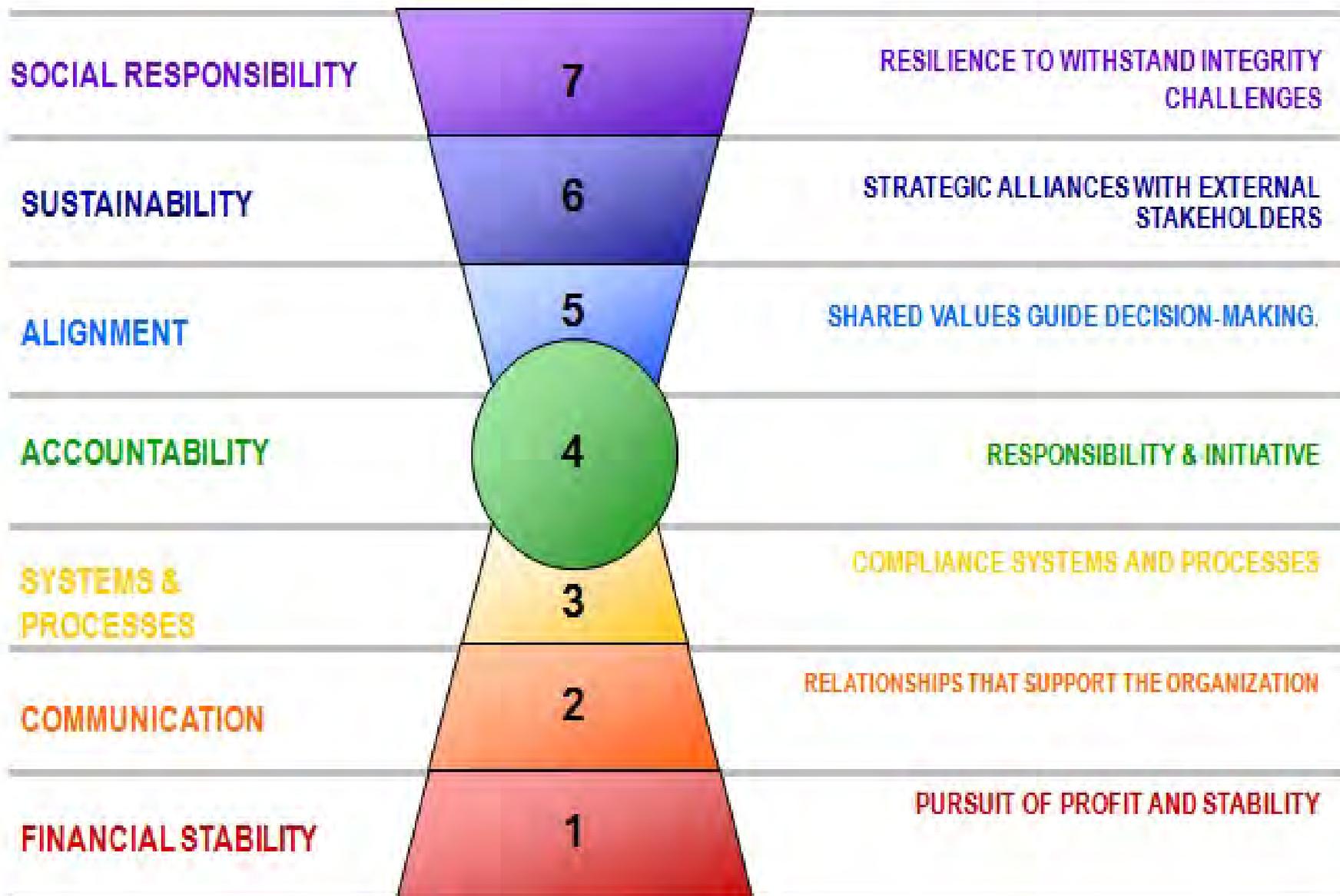


Opportunity?

- Professional organizations representing veterinarians should advocate loudly for the ethical treatment of horses
 - Taking proactive stances
 - Disciplining members, or denying membership to those who fail to abide by ethical standards

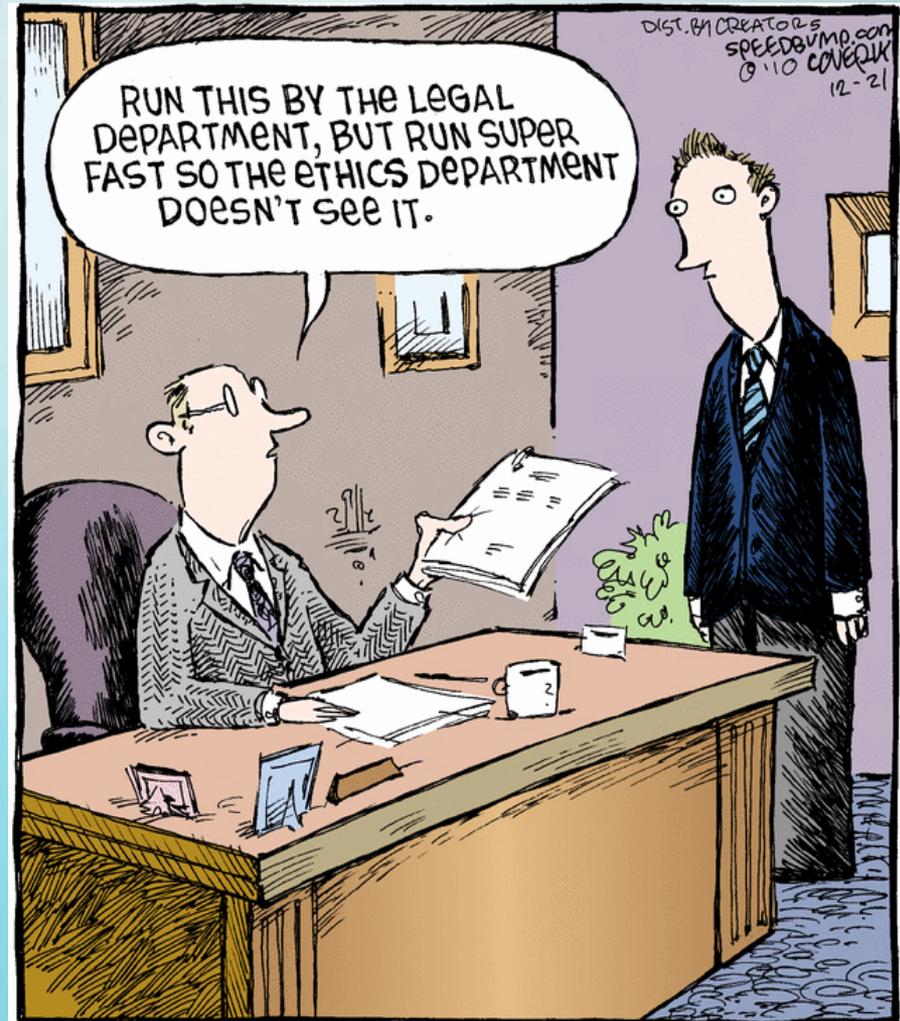


Seven Levels of an Ethical Organization



Opportunity?

- Ethical leaders can strongly influence unethical behavior in the workplace
- Best done before public pressure requires that they do so



Opportunity?

Vocal advocacy for ethical conduct and the welfare of the horse only serves to benefit veterinarians, as well as the veterinary profession (and the horse)



*Thanks
for
Listening*

