Opinion on Communicating the Duty of Care

May 2013
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Scope

1. This Opinion considers owner awareness of the legal duty of care incorporated within updated UK animal welfare legislation, and the five welfare needs upon which it is based. It considers the possible animal welfare benefits of improving owner awareness and examines which groups could help achieve this awareness, how this is currently being approached and how awareness might be further increased.

Background

2. The passing of the Animal Welfare Act (2006), the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act (2006) and the Welfare of Animals Act (Northern Ireland) (2011) updated animal protection legislation in the UK. These Acts retain an offence of causing unnecessary suffering but also, for the first time, introduced a legal duty of care based around an animal’s welfare needs. A person responsible for an animal’s welfare must ensure that the following needs are met –

   (a) a suitable environment,
   (b) a suitable diet,
   (c) to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns,
   (d) to be housed with, or apart from, other animals, and
   (e) to be protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease.

3. Under the Acts, anyone found guilty of allowing or causing an animal under their care to suffer unnecessarily, or not providing for an animal’s welfare needs, may be banned from owning animals, fined up to £20,000 and/or given a custodial sentence.

4. Many working in the field of companion animal welfare believe that the updated Acts have significant potential for improving the welfare of companion animals. For example, the Acts allow inspectors to intervene if one or more of an animal’s needs are not being met, rather than requiring inspectors to wait until unnecessary suffering has occurred. The Acts also require pet keepers and owners to understand what a pet’s five welfare needs are, and how to meet them. Species-specific Codes of Practice published by Governments are used to assist magistrates in deciding whether offences have been committed, and Codes also provide pet owners and keepers with practical guidance on how to meet the five needs for the pet, or pets, they keep.

5. Post-legislative assessment\(^1\) of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 by the Secretary of State concluded that a key criticism of the Act relates to a lack of public awareness of the responsibilities that pet owners now have; a view that is shared by many animal welfare professionals. Clearly, the Acts will not fully
realise their potential if pet owners are unaware of the legislation and the five welfare needs that the Acts enshrine.

6. The purpose of this Opinion is to consider how awareness of the new legislation may be raised amongst the pet-keeping public, with particular reference to the five-point duty of care. It considers how the duty of care might best be communicated to pet owners, and who is responsible for this education.

**Ethical context**

7. CAWC acknowledges that very many of the animals that we keep as companions are capable of thinking and feeling. The results of animal welfare science support this view and continue to provide insights into what companion animals need and want from their perspectives.

8. Coupled with this acknowledgement of sentience is the recognition that companion animals give companionship and pleasure to millions of people, and that the majority of owners regard their pet as a valued family member.

9. It is CAWC’s view that in return for the meaningful benefits conferred on society by animals, we should give those animals the things that they need to be healthy and happy. This is consistent with the principle of fairness or justice and is, in CAWC’s opinion, morally right.

**Why should pet owners and keepers be aware of the five welfare needs?**

10. From the foregoing, there are legal and ethical reasons why owners should be aware of their pets’ five needs.

11. Legally, awareness of the five needs will maximise an owner’s prospects of caring for their pets in legally permissible ways.

12. Ethically, meeting a pet’s five needs will maximise the likelihood that the pet is healthy and happy, in accordance with society’s ethical obligation towards companion animals.

**Significance of “healthy and happy”**

13. “Healthy and happy” captures the mental and physical aspects of animal welfare. To experience good welfare, an animal should be physically healthy (e.g. free from physical disease and injury) and not be experiencing negative mental states (e.g. anxiety, fear or frustration). An animal with good welfare will also experience positive states such as satiety and contentment and may engage in behaviours such as exploration and play². CAWC recognises that discussion of positive welfare terms such as “happiness”, as applied to animals, is in its relative infancy, but notes the suggestion that “not only are such terms unavoidable but it is even possible to argue that at this
stage their emotive values convey useful impressions and provide mutually understandable reference points.”

14. The Five Freedoms have, for a number of years, provided a framework for assessing an animal’s welfare (originally the welfare of farmed animals, but with applicability to many areas of animal use by humans):

   i. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour.

   ii. Freedom from Discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.

   iii. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

   iv. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal’s own kind.

   v. Freedom from Fear and Distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

15. It can be seen that the Five Freedoms incorporate both physical and mental determinants of welfare.

16. The Five Freedoms were modified to ensure legal applicability, resulting in the Five Welfare Needs in the updated animal welfare legislation. These also incorporate physical and mental determinants of welfare and, if met, should result in animals that are “healthy and happy”.

17. Many owners love their pets and regard them as family members. Many also relate to their pets in anthropomorphic ways. This can result in the animals’ species-specific needs not being met, if the animals are viewed and treated as “little people”. A critical, or rational, anthropomorphism recognises that whilst pets may share many emotions with people, they still have species-specific needs. The meaningful expression of an owner’s love, from the pet’s perspective, is having their welfare needs met. Encouraging owners to approach pet ownership via the five welfare needs directs them towards seeing the world from their pet’s perspective and away from uncritical anthropomorphism.

**Are the five welfare needs being met for companion animals?**

18. Clinical and practical experience from veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses and other animal welfare professionals (e.g. behaviourists, groomers, rehoming charities) suggests that some welfare needs are infrequently met for some species. For example, many pet rabbits require treatment for diet-related dental disease (owners having failed their pets’ need for a suitable diet) and many cats are known to live with other unrelated cats, some of
which develop chronic stress and stress-related urinary tract disease\(^6\) (owners misunderstanding their pets’ need for appropriate companionship).

19. There have recently been attempts to quantify these clinical impressions. For example, in 2011 the UK-based veterinary charity, the People’s Dispensary for Sick Animals (PDSA), conducted research\(^7\) to assess whether dogs, cats and rabbits in the UK are having their five welfare needs met. It questioned a nationally representative sample of 11,261 pet owners and identified a number of care deficiencies; for example:

- Nearly two million dogs routinely left alone for longer than recommended every day.
- Over a third of dogs unneutered.
- Over five million cats living in a household with another cat.
- Over half of all cats not microchipped.
- Nearly two thirds of pet rabbits living alone.
- Just under half of pet rabbits given less than the daily recommended amount of hay or grass.

**Current awareness of the five welfare needs**

20. As noted in paragraph 5, Government’s post-legislative scrutiny of the Animal Welfare Act\(^1\) concluded that there is a lack of public awareness surrounding the new responsibilities of pet owners.

21. This was supported by PDSA research in 2012\(^8\) which found that only 31 per cent of owners felt they were familiar with the Animal Welfare Act.

**Should owners be aware of the five welfare needs?**

22. Anyone who owns or cares for pets should be aware of their legal responsibilities towards their animals. It may not be necessary for them to know the name of the relevant Act or to have a detailed knowledge of its content, in the same way that motorists would not be expected to name the Acts which govern responsible driving, or have a close knowledge of their content. But, like motorists, pet owners and keepers should be aware that in acquiring pets, they take on a legal responsibility to provide for the animals’ needs, as motorists must understand their responsibilities around taxation and insurance of their vehicle and safe driving.

23. A general awareness amongst pet owners that they must (legally) “care for their pets properly” would be beneficial. But widely held knowledge and attitudes towards “proper care” may not reflect current best practice, as informed by veterinary and animal welfare science. For example, some cat owners acquire a second, unrelated, cat in good faith, thinking that they are providing their loved pet with a companion to prevent loneliness. Veterinary and behavioural evidence, however, has identified enforced social living in cats as a risk factor for chronic stress and stress-related medical diseases,
especially when the new pet acquisition is coupled with inadequate provision of key resources (e.g. litter trays, feeding bowls, sleeping areas etc).

24. To prevent such issues from arising, it may be sufficient to provide education and raise awareness amongst owners on an issue by issue basis. An alternative approach, however, might be for all owners to be educated that there are five welfare needs which they must meet for their pets. This would provide owners with a more comprehensive approach to the traditional notion of a pet’s “care”, incorporating both physical and mental aspects, and minimising the risk that certain needs are overlooked and/or misunderstood.

25. Clearly, what is important is not only that an owner knows their pet has five key welfare needs, but also how to meet them. Issue-focussed educational initiatives to tackle prevailing welfare issues will still be required. But a needs-based approach to pet care amongst owners could operate preventively, by motivating owners to seek information on how to meet each need. This, in turn, would prompt pet care professionals (pet retailers, veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses etc) to provide care advice around this five-point framework. The veterinary profession has, at times, been criticised for focussing on physical health to the exclusion of other determinants of animal welfare. A five-needs based approach would ensure that, for example, a rabbit’s nutrition and vaccination requirements are discussed alongside the animal’s requirement for an exercise run (of suitable dimensions) and an appropriate companion.

26. Meeting a companion animal’s five needs can also assist an owner in fulfilling their social responsibilities towards others. For example, ensuring that “the need to exhibit normal behaviour patterns” is met, focuses attention on socialisation, habituation, training and the professional treatment of problem behaviour; areas which, in addition to improving animal wellbeing, influence the sociability of animals towards people and other animals in society.

27. PDSA reported that 96 per cent of veterinary professionals believe there is value in encouraging owners to follow the five welfare needs, while 92 per cent of pet owners feel people should have a basic understanding of the health and welfare needs outlined within the updated animal welfare legislation.

Increasing awareness of the five welfare needs

28. If there is to be widespread awareness amongst pet owners of the five-point duty of care, at whom should education be targeted, how should messages be delivered and what should be their tone and content?

Tone and Content

29. The updated animal welfare acts have created a shift from how society should treat companion animals (ethically) to how it must treat them (legally). The tone of the message could reflect this; informing pet owners of their new
responsibilities and warning them of possible consequences if these are not met. This may be appropriate for some audiences.

30. An alternative approach is to raise awareness of the duty of care using positive messaging. This approach begins by acknowledging that most owners love their pets and regard them as valued family members. Most owners want their pets to be healthy and happy. A positive approach to educating owners about the duty of care would communicate the five welfare needs as a 5-step “plan” to achieving health and happiness for their pets. Its aim is to inspire and empower owners to care for their pets in the best possible way, from the animals’ perspectives.

31. If a negative, threatening, tone is reserved for those people who are unreceptive to positive advisory messages (and a minority of such people are likely to always exist), then, overall, messages about the duty of care could be aimed at helping owners achieve what they themselves want; i.e. a healthy and happy life for their pets.

32. The five needs concept then, rather than a set of legal rules to be adhered to, becomes a useful and practical framework for guiding owners to achieve good wellbeing for their animals. In this way, and promulgated nationally, the five needs could become “the language of pet-keeping”, synonymous with pet care.

33. Such a widespread, positive, message might be akin to “five-a-day” in the human nutrition field. This health programme in several countries seeks to encourage people to consume at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day, based on recommendations by the World Health Organisation. Not everyone achieves their five-a-day, but there appears to be widespread recognition that they, at least, should. A similar level of awareness amongst pet owners, of the link between meeting the five needs and their pets’ health and wellbeing, would be desirable.

Target audiences and key information sources

34. Communication about the five welfare needs would need to reach everyone who keeps, or intends to keep, pets. Messages also need to reach, and be understood by, those with responsibility for educating pet owners.

Target audiences

- Young people/children

35. Children will become the next generation of pet owners. If they are to learn about the five welfare needs, education is required at school, via animal clubs (e.g. those run by animal welfare charities) and from those responsible for educating them elsewhere, including at home.

36. The Pet Education Alliance is a coalition of the UK’s pet welfare organisations. They are currently lobbying Government for the teaching of
responsible pet ownership to be retained and strengthened on the National Curriculum. They provide a signposting website where teachers and others can easily access teaching resources, such as curriculum-linked lesson plans provided by the organisations. Talks and visits to children by pet care professionals can also be arranged via the site. The Pet Education Alliance is committed to teaching young people about the five welfare needs. The following is posted on its website:

“We are united by a key belief that children and young people should be educated about caring for animals and the importance of providing for an animal's Five Welfare Needs.”

- Prospective pet owners

37. Pets’ needs are rarely met when owners acquire animals that are not suited to their lifestyle and circumstances. Impulse purchasing of animals is often cited as a reason for their relinquishment to rehoming charities. People buying on impulse may find that they are unable to afford the costs associated with caring for their pet, that the pet is causing unforeseen disruption to their lifestyle or that, after a period of ownership, they have simply become bored with the animal.

38. The first step in addressing this is motivating owners to research pet ownership before deciding to acquire a pet. Such motivation might be achieved by various strategies; for example:

- Issuing warning messages. For example:
  - Without preparation, a pet may disrupt family life (e.g. a young puppy requiring near-constant supervision and attention)
  - Costs of pet care may be higher than anticipated (or unaffordable) if these are not researched first
  - Buying an unhealthy pet (e.g. a kitten or puppy with a heritable disease) can result in human upset, costly veterinary care and the animal suffering
  - Breaking the law, e.g. if a pet’s needs are not met through lack of prior research

- Issuing encouraging messages. For example:
  - Pre-purchase research will result in owners acquiring pets that are well suited to their lifestyle and will fit well into family life
  - Researching a pet’s needs will give the best chance of a new pet being healthy and happy

39. Having motivated a prospective owner to research the pros and cons of pet ownership, including species suitability, various sources may then provide owners with relevant information.
Key information sources

40. Each of the following sources offers opportunities for mentioning the five welfare needs:
   - Educational leaflets

41. Many organisations and charities provide educational leaflets, often containing high quality pet-care information. Presently, few mention legislation or the five welfare needs. A leaflet may give expert-backed information on rabbit nutrition, but not link this to the “need for a suitable diet”. The important care advice is provided, but not details or reinforcement of the underlying welfare framework. Exceptions include the British Veterinary Association Animal Welfare Foundation leaflet, “What makes my pet happy?” and PDSA’s “What your [pet] needs” leaflets, for dogs, cats and rabbits.
   - Websites

42. It is common for buyers of various goods and services to first conduct research on the internet. While there is lots of information (of varying quality) on how to care for different species of pets, few websites place this information in the context of the five welfare needs or give information on how to determine the likely suitability of a given species.

43. Exceptions include the pet care information provided by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA)\textsuperscript{13}, PDSA\textsuperscript{14} and the website of Rabbit Awareness Week (an initiative to raise awareness of rabbit health and welfare)\textsuperscript{15}.

44. PDSA also provides a website called “Your Right Pet”\textsuperscript{16} which is designed to help prospective owners make a good pet choice. The web tool is divided in to two sections. The first asks questions about the user’s lifestyle and circumstances, around the acronym PETS:
   
   Place – how suitable for a pet is the place where you live?
   Exercise – how much exercise could you give your pet?
   Time – how much time do you have available to care for a pet?
   Spend – how much do you want to spend looking after your pet?

45. Based on the answers to these questions, a list of pet species potentially suitable for that user is generated. Clicking on one of these species leads to section two, where the five welfare needs are outlined and information given on how they would need to be met for that species. The user then makes a decision based on whether they feel they could meet that pet’s needs.
   - Books

46. Numerous books on pet care are available. CAWC is not aware of any books for non-specialists that mention the five welfare needs.
• Pet shop staff

47. There are over 4000 pet shops and specialist aquatic centres in the UK, employing over 15000 people. Pet shop staff are uniquely placed to help prospective owners choose an appropriate pet and advise on responsibilities. Customer interactions present opportunities for educating prospective owners about the five welfare needs, as do in-store displays and educational materials.

48. For this to happen, retail staff must be appropriately trained. The Pet Care Trade Association (PCTA), a membership body for pet specialist businesses, provides training courses and qualifications. Their course “Principles of Animal Management within a Pet Store” covers legislation and some of their courses refer to the five welfare needs specifically.

49. In July 2012 it was announced that the RSPCA was going to work more closely with the UK’s leading pet retailer, Pets at Home. This partnership hopes to provide benefits such as:

“Giving the right advice to potential owners” and “Joint promotional work to give specific advice to people on the dietary and welfare needs of rabbits and other small pets.”

50. PDSA provides e-learning courses for pet care professionals, accredited by the British Veterinary Nursing Association. Their course, “What Pets Need”, has the following objectives:

“The aim of this course is to increase your awareness of the Animal Welfare Act 2006 and the 5 welfare needs of companion animals. It is aimed at everyone involved with companion animals on a daily basis, including pet care specialists. This course will also help you to understand the relevance of the 5 welfare needs so you can help people choose the right pet for their life style.”

• Breeders

51. Many pets, especially puppies and kittens, are acquired from breeders. In many cases, the breeder is the first direct contact that a new owner has had with someone experienced in pet care. Breeders are well placed to provide reliable pet care information, based upon the five needs, and their experience of animal-keeping means that pet owners often trust their advice.

52. Breeders of any species, whether or not supplying directly to the public, ought to take reasonable steps to ensure that the offspring of their animals are likely to be healthy and happy; for example, by breeding from parents with desirable temperaments and ensuring parent animals have passed health-screening tests for heritable defects. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is calling for Government welfare codes on responsible breeding for companion animals.
53. The Kennel Club’s Assured Breeder Scheme contains requirements which aim to ensure that a puppy’s welfare needs are met (e.g. socialisation, feeding, worming and vaccination) but does not refer to the five needs themselves.

54. Similarly, the Animal Welfare Foundation/RSPCA Puppy Contract refers to a puppy’s “Future Health and Welfare Needs”, but does not refer to the five needs themselves. The contract’s accompanying website includes a link to advice on the Animal Welfare Act 2006.


- Veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses

56. The veterinary and veterinary nursing professions can promote animal welfare if veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses are trained in animal welfare and are proactive in imparting animal welfare advice to individuals and society.

57. Training should include animal welfare in its broadest sense and not just physical health. All of the UK veterinary schools appear to have expanded their animal welfare teaching in recent years, building on Animal Welfare Foundation lectureships at Bristol, Liverpool and Glasgow veterinary schools, and adding, most recently, the Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal Welfare Education at Edinburgh veterinary school.

58. Veterinary practices, through their relationships with animal-keepers, have a meaningful opportunity to raise awareness of the five welfare needs in local communities. Some animals, especially puppies and kittens, are often presented to veterinary surgeons for a health check soon after acquisition. A veterinary consultation at this time would typically include valuable advice on nutrition, parasite control, socialisation and training, vaccinations, microchipping and neutering.

59. Unfortunately, a post-purchase consultation does not have the benefits of a pre-purchase consultation in advising on a suitable pet for a prospective owner’s lifestyle and circumstances – the animal presented to the veterinary surgeon may not be suitable for the owner, or may suffer from health problems (e.g. an inherited disorder) which could have been avoided if the owner had sought advice prior to purchase. Post-purchase consultations, as well as practice client education sheets, may not incorporate advice on each of the five needs, or may not refer to the needs as an owner-friendly framework for assessing their pet’s (or pets’) wellbeing throughout its life.

60. At the societal and political level, veterinary and veterinary nursing associations can raise awareness of the five needs amongst animal owners and government. Learning that the UK Government had no plans to publish a
code of practice on the welfare of rabbits, the BVA publicly expressed disappointment.24

“The Government has missed an opportunity to educate owners about responsible rabbit ownership and improve the health and welfare of the UK’s third most popular pet.

“Wales has led the way recently with the publication of a code of practice which highlights the welfare needs of rabbits and what the law requires owners to do. It would be heartening to see Defra follow suit.”

- Existing owners

61. It may be more difficult to influence actual rather than prospective owners, as they have already acquired (and often bonded with) an animal, invested in its living environment and become accustomed to a care approach which they find practical and effective.

62. Broadly, those in a position to educate prospective owners also have opportunities to educate existing owners. Veterinary surgeons (individuals and associations), animal welfare charities and Government may also organise campaigns which reach pet owners (e.g. via traditional and social media) who have not come in to contact with an animal welfare professional elsewhere.

Issues to consider

Consensus on how to meet the five welfare needs for different species

63. There is no disagreement about what the five needs are, as these are laid out in the updated UK Acts.

64. Agreement on practical interpretations of each of the needs is needed, for each companion animal species, for consistency of messaging to the pet-owning public. Conflicting advice, e.g. on what constitutes “a suitable diet” for a given species, leads to confusion.

65. Codes of Practice are valuable for providing such interpretations. A well researched and well drafted code should be based on available veterinary and animal welfare science, practical experience and common sense (an approach promoted by the RSPCA’s “Welfare Triangle”25).

66. The “need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns” is sometimes cited as the most contentious, or misunderstood, of the five needs. The interpretation of this need should generally aim to ensure that animals are able to perform highly motivated species-specific behaviour patterns (enabled by the living environment and enrichment devices available to them)26. When considering a companion animal’s behaviour in relation to the animal’s wellbeing, attention should also be given to early experiences (e.g. socialisation, handling), training and humane and effective approaches
towards addressing problem behaviour. These points may be covered under the “behaviour” need, or within other needs such as “companionship”.

67. The Welsh Assembly Government has published Codes of Practice on the welfare of dogs, cats, rabbits and equines. Defra has published codes on the welfare of dogs, cats, horses (including other equidae) and privately kept non-human primates. The Scottish Government has published codes on the welfare of equidae, cats and dogs. The Northern Ireland Government has published codes on the welfare of cats, dogs, horses, non-human primates and rabbits.

68. Clearly, more species are kept as companion animals than are currently covered by the Government codes. More codes are needed – to assist the courts, but also (critically) to assist those working in companion animal welfare to interpret the five welfare needs for different species and then be in a position to communicate these in a unified, concordant way.

69. It would be beneficial if Government were to write and publish more welfare codes for companion animals. Alternatively, it may be possible for the companion animal sector to formulate new codes, for Government to approve and publish.

Possible aims of co-ordinated messaging around the five welfare needs

70. There are likely to be benefits for all pet owners to know that there are five welfare needs which they are legally obliged to meet and which, if met, will result in their pets being healthy and happy.

71. In achieving this, it is likely to be beneficial if every prospective and existing pet owner could, at least, name each of the five welfare needs: Environment, Diet, Behaviour, Companionship, Health.

72. Achieving this awareness might be facilitated if the companion animal sector agreed to present these needs in the same order, in interactions with pet-keepers and in educational materials. The order could be replicated from the Acts (as in paragraph 2) for consistency. Maintaining a consistent order may help to make the five needs framework more recognisable and memorable.

73. Knowing these five words is not enough. What is most important from the animals’ perspectives is that owners know what each of the needs means and how they can be met. But learning the five words (ideally from childhood) is likely to provide a valuable starting point.

Communication methods

- Use of welfare needs symbols

74. Designed symbols are currently used by some groups to illustrate each of the welfare needs, to assist with communication and education where this
occurs. For example, the RSPCA’s “Know what your pet needs” campaign used five symbols on educational leaflets and elsewhere. The Welsh Assembly Government uses five different symbols on its published materials, whilst a further five have been designed by the veterinary charity, PDSA, to support educational campaigns.

75. It is possible that other organisations, such as other welfare charities and private veterinary practices could design different symbols to illustrate the five needs. This may reduce the impact for the public, when pet owners are presented with multiple versions of symbols with the same underlying messages.

76. There may be benefits to a single set of symbols which are used by anyone wishing to communicate the welfare needs through educational materials. These symbols would effectively act like the logos commonly associated with assurance schemes, e.g. farm animal welfare assurance schemes. This raises the issue of who would be responsible for monitoring and enforcing standards (e.g. checking that the educational material reflects advice given in the relevant published Government code).

77. Another issue is where welfare needs symbols should appear to maximise educational benefit. At CAWC’s 2012 Animal Welfare Conference, it was suggested during an open discussion that the five needs symbols could appear on packets of pet food. This, it was argued, would make the symbols visible to the majority of pet owners, as most pet owners purchase commercial pet foods. This idea was subsequently reported in the veterinary press.

78. An alternative approach would be for each of the needs symbols to appear on different pet products, depending on the need which the product helps to meet. For example, a symbol representing the “diet” need could appear on pet food packaging, whilst a symbol representing the “behaviour” need could appear on the packaging of pet toys. This could help link products, in the minds of pet owners, to the underlying five needs framework.

79. It is emphasised that enforcement of such a scheme would be important. There would be disbenefits if a pet shop, for example, applied a five needs “diet” symbol to bags of unsuitable pet food (e.g. muesli mix for rabbits, or sunflower seeds for pet birds), where use of the symbol would imply compliance with a national scheme and/or adherence to the guidance in a published Government code.

80. The Department of Health worked with NSF-CMi, a food assurance company, to develop the five-a-day logo as a certified trademark and to control its use via a licensing scheme. There may be a similar benefit if Government, or another organisation with relevant expertise, developed a similar scheme for the five welfare needs logo(s) and their accredited use.
• Reinforcement of messages through images and language

81. The ultimate purpose of educating pet owners about the five welfare needs is the creation of new cultural norms in pet-keeping attitudes and practices. Images of companion animals, together with language used when referring to companion animals, can illustrate and reinforce desirable norms.

82. Images and language can also reinforce (often unintentionally) existing, undesirable, norms. For example, some care guides explain that rabbits are social animals and should be kept with an appropriate companion, but then refer to “your pet rabbit” (i.e. singular) throughout the rest of the document. This is sometimes coupled with images of a pet rabbit housed alone, reflecting a current, rather than aspirational, approach to rabbit-keeping. Examples of this can even be found in Government codes of practice.

• Reinforcement of messages through housing and husbandry of pets by suppliers

83. Pet retailers selling animals must comply with legislation and care guidelines. Whilst animals may be diligently cared for, compliance with legal standards permits some animals to be kept in relatively small accommodation with little enrichment. Rodents, for example, may not, in practice, be provided with an exercise wheel, nest box or enrichment objects. It may be argued that such accommodation is temporary (until the animal is sold) and that there are commercial considerations. However, suppliers who adhere only to minimum standards of housing and husbandry do not provide visible reinforcement of a five welfare needs-focussed approach to pet care.

• Pre-acquisition training/assessment

84. In light of commonly occurring care deficiencies towards companion animals, some people feel that prospective owners ought to undertake basic pre-acquisition training on how to meet the five welfare needs of the species they intend to keep. Many people also feel that the competence of prospective owners in meeting the five welfare needs should be assessed before ownership of a given species is permitted. PDSA found that 65 per cent of veterinary professionals, 65 per cent of children and 47 per cent of the public felt that prospective owners should pass a test before taking on a pet. The conceptual and practical aspects of such an assessment have not been explored to date in the UK. CAWC is aware that under Swiss legislation, dog owners must pass theoretical and practical courses on keeping and handling dogs before taking on responsibility for a dog’s care.

The role of Government

85. Governments pass the Acts and draft Codes of Practice. When the Animal Welfare Act came in to force, Government produced educational leaflets and posters aimed at pet-keepers, about their new responsibilities.
86. At a 2005 meeting of the Animal Welfare Science, Ethics and Law Veterinary Association (AWSELVA), a Government representative said that pet shops would be supplied with Codes of Practice to give to new owners. The representative also said that Codes of Practice would be produced for all species. Neither of these commitments has been fulfilled. At the same meeting, a view was also expressed by a delegate that “companion animal owners may be more receptive if codes are presented as guidelines which will help give the animal a better life”, rather than intimidating and unappealing legal documents.

87. Government could assist with promoting the legal duty of care and the five welfare needs. This could include funding for educational initiatives, though it is acknowledged that current economic conditions are challenging.

Conclusions

88. Updated animal welfare legislation in the UK has introduced a legal duty of care which requires animal keepers and owners to meet their animals’ five welfare needs.

89. Accompanying Codes of Practice provide guidance for magistrates when considering legal cases and for owners on practically interpreting the five welfare needs for the animals they keep.

90. There is currently low awareness amongst owners of the new Acts or the five welfare needs enshrined within them.

91. There are legal and ethical reasons why owners should be aware of, and meet, the five welfare needs.

92. Practical experience and published evidence shows that many companion animals are failing to have some of their five needs met. Some problems occur frequently.

93. Meeting a companion animal’s five needs should result in that animal having good physical and mental wellbeing, i.e. being healthy and happy.

94. Many owners, though loving their pets, humanise them and relate to them in anthropomorphic ways. This can contribute to welfare problems.

95. Educating owners that there are five welfare needs which they must meet for their pets could result in a more comprehensive approach to the traditional notions of a pet’s “care”.

96. Educational messages about the five welfare needs may be positive (encouraging) or negative (threatening). Positive messaging could help owners achieve what they themselves want; i.e. a healthy and happy life for their pets.
97. It would be beneficial if educational messages about the five welfare needs were to reach young people/children, as well as prospective (especially) and existing pet owners.

98. There is a range of communication channels which could be used to educate relevant groups about the five welfare needs. Currently, it is rare for the animal welfare legislation or the five needs to be explicitly mentioned in pet health and welfare educational materials. This is likely to be contributing to low awareness amongst pet owners.

99. There are examples of differences in opinion on how to meet certain welfare needs for certain species. This can lead to confused messages being received by the pet-keeping public. Well researched and well drafted codes of practice can help achieve consensus on how companion animals should be cared for, allowing agreed messages to be communicated to the public.

100. Some organisations use symbols to illustrate the five needs. Different organisations use different symbols, which may lead to confusion amongst pet-keepers.

101. The widespread, unchecked, use of welfare needs symbols could diminish their value as educational devices, e.g. if they were linked to poor quality advice by unqualified people.

102. It is currently not uncommon for images and language in educational and advisory documents to reinforce current norms in pet-keeping, rather than promoting new norms (for example, depicting and referring to social animals in the singular, despite having advised that they should be kept in compatible groupings).

103. The ways in which animals are being cared for at point-of-supply (e.g. in pet shops) may influence pet-owner attitudes towards how different species of companion animals can, or should be, cared for.

104. Evidence suggests that there is support from the public and veterinary professionals for prospective owners to pass a competence test before they are permitted to acquire a companion animal.

105. Governments have not published Codes of Practice for as many companion animal species as they suggested they would, nor been active in ongoing education and promotion of the updated legislation amongst pet-keepers.

Recommendations

106. All pet keepers and owners should be aware of the five welfare needs, and know that they are legally responsible for meeting them for the animal(s) they keep.
107. Educational tools aimed at owners (e.g. leaflets, websites, books, face-to-face interactions with pet care professionals) should include information on an owner's legal responsibilities and explicitly structure pet care information around the five welfare needs framework.

108. Generally, the five welfare needs should be communicated in a positive way, as a five-step “plan” to a pet’s health and happiness. The aim should be to help owners achieve what they themselves want; i.e. a healthy and happy life for their pets.

109. Meeting the five welfare needs should become synonymous with pet care across the UK.

110. Opportunities for teaching children about responsible pet ownership should be expanded in the National Curriculum. The five welfare needs should provide the basis for such education, building on the approach of the Pet Education Alliance.

111. Prospective pet owners should be motivated to research which species and breed is most likely to be suited to their lifestyle and circumstances and to consider whether they will be able to provide for a pet’s five welfare needs throughout the animal’s life.

112. Training of pet retail staff should be strengthened where necessary, to ensure a good working knowledge of the updated animal welfare legislation and training in how to communicate the five welfare needs to prospective and existing animal owners. Training course providers should ensure that the five welfare needs are thoroughly and competently covered.

113. Pet breeders should be aware of their legal responsibilities, ensure they meet the five welfare needs for their animals and their animals’ offspring, and be able to clearly communicate the five welfare needs, and how to meet them, to those who purchase animals from them.

114. Training for veterinary students and veterinary nursing students should be strengthened where necessary, to ensure a good working knowledge of the updated animal welfare legislation and training in how to communicate the five welfare needs to prospective and existing animal owners. Veterinary and veterinary nursing associations should explicitly promote a five needs-based approach to responsible pet ownership.

115. The companion animal sector (e.g. veterinary and veterinary nursing professionals, pet retailers, trade associations, breeder associations, Governments etc) should agree practical interpretations of each of the five needs across different companion animal species. The aim should be consensus on how each of the needs can be met for every companion animal species, beginning with those most commonly kept.
More codes of practice should be drafted to help achieve consensus on how the five welfare needs can be met for different companion animal species. Ideally, this should be by Government, with relevant expert input.

Alternatively, veterinary and companion animal welfare organisations, with input from experienced animal keepers, should draft new codes, for these to be approved by Government.

All codes of practice should be based upon relevant veterinary and animal welfare science, practical experience of keeping the species in question and common sense.

Particular attention should be paid by those with responsibility for education, on agreeing a working definition of “the need to be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns” and what this ought to cover.

Every pet owner, as a starting point, should at least know the five words corresponding to the five welfare needs: Environment, Diet, Behaviour, Companionship, Health.

The companion animal sector should decide whether communicating these five words in a standardised order (possibly mirroring the Acts) will help make them more recognisable and memorable. If so, those within the sector should follow this order whenever possible.

The companion animal sector should consider issues surrounding the use of welfare needs symbols, including the possible proliferation of different symbols, where such symbols should appear and the potential for confusion and weakening of messages if this is not controlled.

Government or another suitable organisation with relevant expertise should consider developing the five welfare needs symbols as a certified trademark and to control their use via a licensing scheme. Such a body could take advice from the Department of Health, who developed a similar scheme for use of the five-a-day logo in the human nutrition field.

Those supplying pets, including pet retailers and breeders, should provide living environments and standards of care which meet the animals’ five welfare needs. This is a legal requirement, but is also likely to be important for visibly conveying to prospective owners how different animals ought to be kept. If necessary, this should go beyond minimum legal requirements; for example, by providing larger, enriched accommodation for the animals.

A meeting should be convened amongst relevant groups to discuss and agree the foregoing. The aim should be a sector-wide strategy for communicating the five welfare needs to animal keepers in a co-ordinated way.
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