The Practice of Veterinary Medicine

In reference to House Bill 877 (2013)

Veterinary Medicine is an extremely diverse discipline involving many animal species. As such, the practice of veterinary medicine is rather broadly defined in the Veterinary Practice Act. In 1905, the Missouri Veterinary Medical Board was established to make certain those individuals who engage in the practice of veterinary medicine have professional qualifications, are strictly regimented and maintain the standards set forth in said practice act.

By maintaining and enforcing these standards and holding licensed veterinarians accountable for their actions, the state can ensure that the public health and animal welfare are protected. Conversely, there are exemptions listed within the veterinary practice act which allow unlicensed individuals to perform certain procedures that otherwise may be considered veterinary medicine. This judiciously ensures that animal care is not solely under the control of veterinarians.

Activities including pet grooming, horseshoeing or farriery, artificial insemination and heat detection coincide with veterinary medicine, but are not considered the practice of veterinary medicine. They are currently not in the definition of veterinary medicine, nor has it ever been suggested they should be. Conversely, other activities such as animal dentistry, embryo transfer, neutering and spaying are considered the practice of veterinary medicine because they require either invasive procedures and/or the use of prescription pharmaceuticals. In the hands of untrained individuals, these procedures have a much higher likelihood of complications. Parenthetically, owners of animal(s) or owner’s employees are not prohibited from caring for and treating said owner’s animals. This is under the assumption that any treatment(s) be performed in a humane way and not deemed neglectful or abusive.

There are, however, certain procedures which require not only knowledge of the procedure(s) itself, but knowledge of what effect said procedure(s) can have on the entire animal.

When vaccinating an animal, should one use a killed or live vaccine? What are the advantages and disadvantages of these types of vaccines? What are symptoms of an allergic reaction to a vaccine? How is an allergic reaction treated? Currently, the only vaccines that are restricted to use by a veterinarian are those for brucellosis and rabies because both of these diseases have serious human health consequences.

When castrating or spaying (performing an ovariohysterectomy), what is the proper anesthetic to use and what are the proper doses? What is the protocol if an animal stops breathing while under anesthesia or has protracted bleeding? What type of sedative should be
used when performing dentistry on an animal? Is the animal healthy enough to undergo sedation or anesthesia and any subsequent procedures?

Does an abnormal tooth need to be surgically removed or will a restorative procedure be appropriate?

When an animal is presented on an emergency basis, what are the initial signs of shock? Where should an intravenous catheter be placed? What if that site is not accessible? Should a crystalloid or colloid solution be used as the initial intravenous fluid?

What is “herd work?” Is it counseling clients on nutrition or vaccination? Is it castrating all or some calves in a herd? Is it inserting an implant in a young heifer?

House Bill 877 (2013) does not define “animal dentistry,” “tooth floating,” “estrus Synchronization,” “heat detection,” “emergency services,” “herd work,” or “massage.” Consequently, it is vague and ambiguous about what might or might not mean by these terms and phrases.

Vagueness and ambiguity of terms in statutes and regulations gives rise to the potential for litigation with resulting expenses and costs which must be borne by the State of Missouri and its taxpayers.

In addition, the phrase “herd work” has potential implications with resulting confusion given various references in the United States Department of Agriculture’s Uniform Methods and Rules governing accredited herd work by licensed veterinarians.

Modifying the definition of veterinary medicine needlessly raises many more questions than it answers. It is a false association to name exceptions such as grooming and farriery, which have never been considered veterinary medicine, and mix them with equine dentistry which has been proven and upheld to be veterinary medicine. The current definition of veterinary medicine has served the citizens of Missouri well for many decades. For the sake of common sense, the protection of consumers, and the welfare of the animals they own, the Veterinary Practice Act is best left unchanged.