Wildlife Rehabilitation and Wildlife Veterinary Medicine: Understanding the Rules and Regulations

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PRACTICE OF WILDLIFE REHABILITATION

- Per National Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Association
  - Treatment and temporary care of injured, diseased, and displaced indigenous wildlife and the subsequent return of healthy animals to appropriate habitats in the wild

- NWRA Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Code of Ethics
  - A wildlife rehabilitator should acknowledge limitations and enlist the assistance of a veterinarian or other trained professional when appropriate
  - A wildlife rehabilitator must abide by local, state, provincial and federal laws concerning wildlife, wildlife rehabilitation and associated activities

PRACTICE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE

Per American Veterinary Medical Association

- To diagnose, prognose, treat, correct, change, alleviate, or prevent animal disease, illness, pain, deformity, defect, injury, or other physical, dental, or mental condition to include:
  - Medical or surgical procedure
  - Prescribe, dispense, administer any drug, medicine, biologic, apparatus, or anesthetic
  - Use of any complementary or alternative therapy
  - Determination of the health, fitness, or soundness of an animal
WHAT IS VETERINARY MEDICINE VERSUS TREATMENT OF WILDLIFE?

- May be difficult to differentiate
- Work in the best interest of the animal
- Know personal limitations
- Enlist assistance of a veterinary when necessary
- Laws pertaining to veterinary treatment of animals (including wildlife) differ from state to state

Veterinarians and Rehabilitators: Virginia as a Case Study

GENERAL OVERVIEW

- Any persons caring for sick, injured, orphaned, or displaced wildlife must have a VDGIF Wildlife Rehabilitation permit
- If rehabilitating migratory birds also need a USFWS Federal Special Purpose Rehabilitation Permit
- Four categories of rehabilitators
  - I – Apprentice
  - II – Fully trained
  - III – Veterinarian on-site
  - IV – Care provider
- Approximately 300 permitted wildlife rehabilitators
BOARD OF PHARMACY (WALNUTS)

- Possession and prescription of drugs
- Schedule I – V recognized by DEA
  - Schedule VI recognized by Virginia Board of Pharmacy
  - Sterile fluids, antibiotics, veterinary non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, antifungals, any not over-the-counter drugs that are not Schedule I-V

VETS AND REHABBERS – CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES

- Vets may prescribe and dispense drugs for treatment of a specific wildlife patient
  - Vets cannot provide rehabilitators with general stock of Controlled Substances to be used “as necessary”
- Wildlife rehabilitators cannot legally possess general stock of Controlled Substances
  - Virginia Board of Pharmacy Schedule VI registration necessary for rehabilitator to possess drugs not prescribed by vet for specific animal

VETERINARIAN OF RECORD

- Application requires signature of Veterinarian of Record
- Assessment, treatment, diagnostics, prescriptions, euthanasia
- Up to Vet of Record and rehabilitator to determine extent of relationship
  - Recommendations:
    - Veterinarian review wildlife rehabilitation permit conditions each year to ensure that permittee is abiding
    - Veterinarian visit facility regularly
    - Rehabilitator initiate regular communications
- Rehabilitator may work with vets other than Vet of Record
Licensed veterinarians may provide medical care to sick, injured, or debilitated wildlife without a rehabilitator’s permit:
- May hold wildlife until stabilized
- Must transfer wildlife patient to permitted rehabilitator once stabilized
- Vets need to have a rehabilitator’s permit if rehabilitating recovered or healthy wildlife for release
- Do not need to be the Veterinarian of Record on application to provide treatment to wildlife.

"Possession" defined as exercise of control of any wild animal, wild bird, fish, or fur-bearing animal:
- If a veterinarian is considered to be in possession of an unpermitted exotic animal during an exam or treatment, vet could be charged for unlawfully possession of an exotic animal.

Most prudent clinical protocol = only perform routine treatments and exams on properly permitted exotic animals:
- Emergency exception.

§ 54.1-3800. Practice of veterinary medicine.
- Any person shall be deemed to be practicing veterinary medicine who performs the diagnosis, treatment, correction, change, relief or prevention of animal disease, deformity, defect, injury, or other physical or mental conditions; including the performance of surgery or dentistry, the prescription or administration of any drug, medicine, biologic, apparatus, application, anesthetic, or other therapeutic or diagnostic substance or technique.
- Nothing in this chapter shall prohibit persons permitted or authorized by the Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries from providing care for wildlife provided that the Department determines that such persons are in compliance with its regulations and permit conditions.
Rehabilitators - Treatment of Wildlife

- Category I and IV
  - May only administer Controlled Substances under direct supervision of vet or Category II or III rehabilitator
  - May provide basic care only (food, shelter, warmth, water)

- Category II
  - May administer Controlled Substances that have been prescribed to a specific animal by a licensed veterinarian
  - May provide treatment to injured or diseased wildlife under the general supervision of a veterinarian or Category III facility

General Supervision of Veterinarian

Open to interpretation

- Recommendations:
  - Veterinarians
    - Be confident in the skills of the rehabilitator
    - Develop a skill set list
      - Oral and injectable medication administration, bandage changes, figure-8 bandage application, SQ fluids, etc.
  - Rehabilitators
    - Attend wildlife medicine CE regularly and keep skills sharp
    - Communicate regularly with veterinarian

Summary

- Be familiar with state rules and regulations regarding veterinary medicine, wildlife rehabilitation, and pharmaceuticals
- Know personal limits for veterinary treatments and procedures
  - Attend wildlife medicine Continuing Education regularly
  - Keep skills sharp
  - Contact a veterinarian when necessary
- Establish a relationship with a veterinarian who is interested in wildlife medicine and has experience
  - Establish open communication and encourage regular visits
Questions?