SOUTH AFRICAN VETERINARY COUNCIL

GUIDELINES (E) FOR VETERINARIANS ASSESSING

ANIMAL WELFARE ASSISTANTS

First draft September 2009 (R&A Committee with input from Dr Leslie Lunn)

1. Introduction

This document serves to assist veterinarians accredited by the South African Veterinary Council (SAVC) to assess animal welfare assistants (AWAs) who have applied for authorisation under Section 23 of the Veterinary and Para-Veterinary Professions Act (the Act).

Assessors are advised to familiarise themselves with the documents "Guidelines for the authorisation of animal welfare assistants", "Criteria for the assessment of animal welfare assistants" and "Guidelines for the Use of Medicines by Animal Welfare Assistants".

The assessor should be cognisant of the role of the AWA in the animal welfare organisation (AWO). The aim is to balance a need for some sort of veterinary intervention in those areas where no professionals are available with the requirements of the Act. The assessor should therefore begin by establishing what role the AWA plays in his or her society. (For the sake of brevity the document will henceforth use the male gender to denote either gender).

The functions generally performed by AWAs include the following:

A. Euthanasia only (as in the case of most SPCA inspectors)
B. Euthanasia and primary animal health care i.e. vaccinations, deworming, dipping
C. Assisting veterinarians with their work at veterinary facilities at AWOs
D. Primary health care, treatment of common conditions and euthanasia in veterinary facilities at AWOs
E. Primary health care, treatment of common conditions and euthanasia in mobile units
F. Euthanasia only with no veterinary supervision or direction (these candidates apply for MRA permits to acquire, keep and use pentobarbitone and must comply with strict requirements – this is only extended to very well motivated cases – refer to the relevant document “Policy guidelines for dealing with applications from animal welfare assistants for MRA permits to acquire, keep and use sodium pentobarbitone”)
With regards to euthanasia, it is recommended that assessors familiarise themselves with Section 5 (1) and 8(d) of the Animals Protection Act so that they are aware of the legislation regarding an AWA's (and SPCA Inspector) right to euthanase. One should also establish the extent of the veterinarian's involvement (Section 1.3.6). The less the veterinarian is involved, the stricter the assessment should be as these candidates might have to make decisions without being immediately able to refer to a veterinarian.

2. The assessment

2.1 General recommendations
Assessors are advised to request an ID document of each candidate to confirm the identity of the candidate. It is also advisable to ascertain in advance the preferred language in which the candidate would like to conduct the assessment and to ensure (with the assistance of the AWO) that there is a reliable interpreter available to assist should the assessor not be fluent in the candidate’s language of choice. The interpreter should be advised not to assist the candidate in any way. Apart from the candidate, assessor and interpreter, no one else may be present during the assessment except an orderly to restrain animals for euthanasia.

Most of the candidates do not have a scientific background and thus should not be penalised for lack of terminology as long as the meaning is clear. For example "thick snotty nose" for purulent nasal discharge or "runny tummy" for diarrhoea is acceptable.

The assessment consists of two main sections: The compulsory section for all AWAs (Sections A to G) and an optional section (H to K – each section individually is optional)). SPCA inspectors being authorised for euthanasia only must be assessed for Sections A and I.

Assessors are not required to “pass” or “fail” candidates. The level of competency (competent or not competent) for each section must be indicated on the assessment form by the assessor. The final recommendation to Council is made by the Registration and Authorisation Committee which evaluates the application based on the assessment and other factors. Full Council then considers each application and makes a final decision.

2.2 Specific recommendations
The following should be read together with the revised (January 2010) version of the AWA assessment form. Everything indicated on the assessment should be assessed for – this document merely serves to elucidate the criteria, keeping in mind the specie(s) the candidate is being assessed for.
A. Understanding the role and responsibility of the AWA in terms of the Act

The candidate should know that authorisation

- is the privilege to perform certain functions that are legally reserved for the veterinary profession
- is for a limited period only
- is not transferable to another employer

The candidate should understand

- that authorisation is subject to control by a veterinarian
- the various levels of veterinary control (e.g. direction and supervision)
- that the AWA is accountable for his actions not only to the controlling veterinarian but also to the South African Veterinary Council
- that the ultimate responsibility for his actions rests with the AWA himself and not with the controlling veterinarian
- that should the AWA not conform to the conditions of authorisation, this would result in a disciplinary action and the authorisation may be withdrawn

B. Examining a patient and recognising a healthy animal

The candidate should demonstrate

- a systematic approach to performing a physical examination
- an understanding of what constitutes normal e.g. pink mucous membranes, loose and elastic skin, absence of discharges
- the ability to keep meaningful records

The candidate is required to recognise that the animal is sick and bring it to the attention of the vet, not make a diagnosis.

C. Basic husbandry

Candidates must indicate a basic understanding of husbandry in the species they are being evaluated on. It is important that they have a good practical understanding relating to their scope of work e.g. if they work in a squatter camp it is no use recommending shop bought kennels and premium pet foods. They must know the difference between chaining and running chains. In the case of equines they must know the correct way to apply hobbles, the basics of shoeing and the husbandry differences between donkeys and horses.
D. Administration of medicines

Candidates must be able to ensure that correct dosages are given. Ideally, the veterinarian should calculate the dose and merely inform the AWA what it is. However, there will be instances where the AWA will be expected to calculate a dosage. Candidates should therefore be able to calculate individual animal dosages from mg/kg and should be able to convert mg/kg to mls if they are not working under close supervision of a veterinarian.

Candidates should know what side effects are. Even if they don’t know the term, as long as they can give an example of an undesirable side effect and know what course of action to take when there are side-effects (stop the treatment and inform the veterinarian).

They should be able to demonstrate

- the correct technique of administering tablets/capsules, liquids and pastes per os (please note that nasogastric tubing in horses is NOT considered a procedure an AWA should perform)
- the correct technique of giving a subcutaneous injection (they should preferably aspirate before injecting)
- giving an accurate instruction – written and verbal – to an animal owner when medicines are dispensed

E. Vaccinations, deworming and external parasite control

Candidates should be able to explain in simple terms

- why vaccines should be kept cold
- what vaccines are
- a basic vaccination protocol (assessors should keep in mind that different veterinarians use different protocols)
- the risks involved when vaccinating pregnant or ill animals
- the different types of worms (tape and round worms)
- the connection between fleas and tapeworm
- the difference between worms and bots (where the candidate is being evaluated for equines)
- the different types of products available for ticks and fleas.
- the risks involved with treating adult and young animals for ectoparasites

Candidates should be able to demonstrate how to inject a vaccine using aseptic technique, remembering to aspirate before injecting.
F. Dealing with injured animals

The candidate should be able to

- explain and demonstrate the principles of wound cleaning (e.g. not use the same swab repeatedly in a wound)
- differentiate between treating a fresh wound and a necrotic maggot infested one

G. Zoonoses

The candidate should be able to explain the concept, provide examples and explain basic methods of preventing zoonoses.

H. Radiographs (optional)

The candidate should

- understand that radiation is dangerous
- not to get their hands in the primary beam
- use their protective clothing and dosimeters
- know that no one else including owners should be in the x-ray room when in use

Females should be aware of the dangers of radiation and know that they should inform their superior if they even think that they might be pregnant.

I. Euthanasia (optional)

The candidate should

- demonstrate the ability to check the paper work to ensure that the correct animal is being euthanased
- demonstrate the ability to choose the correct size of syringe, needle or intravenous cathether
- practically perform at least one euthanasia, if possible including a neonate
- if no neonate is available for euthanasia, the candidate should demonstrate on another animal where he / she would have injected the young intraperitoneally
- handle the animal without excessive force
- demonstrate the ability to confirm that the animal is dead not anaesthetised

A candidate is considered incompetent if
• unable to locate the vein and continues poking wildly
• he blows the vein and is not aware of it

The temperament of the animal must be taken into account, e.g. in the case of a very fractious cat, the candidate will not be marked incompetent for not succeeding in finding the vein immediately.

The candidate should understand how a haematoma can form as a result of an intravenous injection, what to do about it and why it can negatively affect the well-being of the animal before it dies.

Note: It is acceptable for candidates to use either a needle for intravenous injection or an intravenous catheter. The IV catheter is considered to be better in terms of preventing complications such as haematoma formation, however competence in IV catheter placement for euthanasia does not automatically imply authorisation for placing IV catheters for administration of IV fluids. This has to be applied for separately and will only be approved if the need for it is well motivated (see L).

J. Intramuscular and intravenous injections (optional)

The candidate should
• demonstrate the ability to observe aseptic technique
• aspirate prior to injecting
• be able to identify correctly at least one site for intramuscular and intravenous injections.

K. Make a blood smear (optional)

The candidate should demonstrate the ability to make a blood smear of an acceptable standard.

L. Administration of intravenous drips (optional, separate application)

Candidates who wish to obtain authorisation for inserting intravenous drips must provide a strong motivation by separate application. The application must include proof of competence evaluated by at least one veterinarian. The applicant must demonstrate competency in terms of placement of the IV catheter as well as understanding of the IV set-up and the basic principles of managing the IV set-up e.g. why drips stop running and what to do about it.
Therapeutic decisions regarding choice and dose of intravenous agents remain with the veterinarian, therefore case-by-case supervision is required – AWAs only do the manual insertion and care of the IV set-up.