An AWF Case Study

How much??

THIS CASE IS ABOUT TRYING TO ADOPT HIGHER STANDARDS OF ANALGESIA DURING ROUTINE SURGICAL PROCEDURES

www.animalwelfarefoundation.org.uk
You are a new graduate, a few weeks into your first job. The boss has asked you to go and see Mr Grundy, an old fashioned farmer who raises a few single suckled calves every year. He wants the 6 month bull calves surgically castrated.

The boss has said “Don’t use too much local as he’s always complaining about the bill.” You are aware that not only is local anaesthesia mandatory at this age for surgical castration, but that its analgesic effects will only last a couple of hours at best. You are very aware that most farm animals suffer from lack of analgesia in many routine procedures and are anxious to educate your clients (and your boss!) about the welfare implications of this.

When you get to the farm, you prepare your local anaesthetic and tell Mr Grundy you would like to use non-steroidal anti-inflammatory in each animal as well. He asks how much that would cost for his 16 calves, and the answer makes his eyebrows rise into his hairline. “Not at that price – they’ve never had it before and they’ve been fine”.

What should you do? (continue for answers)
Stakeholders and relevant considerations

• The calves

The calves stand to experience pain as a result of the surgical castration. Is causing this pain ethically justifiable? Do the calves need to be castrated? How severe is the pain and does this matter? How do we know how severe the pain is? How long will it last and does this matter? How do we know how long it is likely to last?

Mr Grundy the farmer

Trying to run an economically viable business and keen to reduce costs. Perceives no problem with the status quo.

Your boss

Also trying to run an economically viable business. Keen to retain clients and achieve client satisfaction. Also a vet, with attendant requirement to ensure animal welfare.
Stakeholders and relevant considerations

• Newly qualified vet

Animal welfare teaching has gained increased prominence on veterinary undergraduate curricula. As a result, newly qualified vets are more likely to ethically appraise their actions and seek to challenge the status quo when their knowledge of veterinary and animal welfare science tells them that welfare is likely to be compromised. The vet knows that an injection of NSAID, used alongside sufficient local anaesthetic, would have the greatest effect in minimising the pain felt by the cattle. Not being permitted to manage the animals’ pain may result in (a) losing the will to offer such drugs in future, or (b) moral distress, knowing that preventable pain has been caused at his/her hands.
Relevant legislation and professional guidance

“...constant endeavour will be to ensure the welfare of the animals committed to my care.” RCVS declaration

“Make animal welfare your first consideration in seeking to provide the most appropriate attention for animals committed to your care.” RCVS GPC

The Animal Welfare Act 2006 s. 5 defines and bans mutilations, but allows the national authority to exempt certain procedures via regulations. Exemptions are laid out in The Mutilations (Permitted Procedures) (England) Regulations 2007.

Castration is a permitted procedure in cattle. Must be performed in accordance with following rules as laid out in the 2007 Regulations.

Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, as amended, only a veterinary surgeon may castrate a calf which has reached the age of two months. Only a veterinary surgeon can perform surgical castration (at any age).

The Cattle Code says other methods should be performed by “a trained and competent stock-keeper”.

HOW MUCH?? – AWF CASE STUDY
Relevant legislation and professional guidance

Other considerations:

• Why castrate? Benefits to the farmer:
  • Decrease aggressive behaviour
  • Raise males and females together without unwanted pregnancies
  • More favourable carcass characteristics
  • Options of varied rearing methods and duration of fattening dependent on resources available

• Severity and duration of welfare compromise
  • Procedure (pain)
  • Handling stress
  • Risk of complications
What could be done in practice?

• Ensure rigorous justification for procedure, farm by farm.
• Ensure done as young as possible to minimise stress.
• Offer optimum anaesthesia and analgesia (beyond legal minimum).
• See if practice protocol can be changed – raise at vets’ meeting – so uniform approach across all vets.
• Offer training sessions to farm staff so suitably competent and humane.

However, it is notoriously difficult to motivate change without financial incentive. This needs change at societal level (see following section).
What could be done in policy?

- Encourage farmers to convert to organic?

“A new regulation on organic production came into effect in January 2009. Most of Article 18 of regulation 889/2008 is the same as the previous regulation, covering the potential authorisation of operations such as tail docking, dehorning and castration. But the second part of Article 18 (1) is new: it says that “any suffering to the animals shall be reduced to a minimum by applying adequate anaesthesia and/or analgesia and by carrying out the operation only at the most appropriate age by qualified personnel...”

...So why should organic producers consider pain relief when carrying out these operations – especially if UK legislation does require the use of anaesthetic? Well, one of the fundamental organic principles is the need to ensure the highest possible animal welfare for organic animals. Recent research confirms that these operations cause pain...“

- Encourage farmers to farm to RSPCA Freedom Food welfare standards? e.g. sheep standards (April 2010):

“The impact of castration on lamb welfare is reduced by the use of pain relief, which should be applied whenever possible. Producers should discuss pain management and relief at castration with a veterinary surgeon and review the options regularly. The RSPCA is continuing to review the available information and research on this issue and intends to reflect any new developments in the RSPCA welfare standards. As soon as practical, viable methods of pain relief at castration become available their application will become a requirement under the standards.”

(nb. welfare standards re beef cattle say procedure must be performed in way “which minimises suffering”. Specific mention of use of analgesics is in section on treatment of lameness.)

- Lobby for local anaesthetic and NSAIDs to be developed and licensed?
About AWF

The Animal Welfare Foundation (AWF) aims to alleviate unnecessary pain and suffering in all animals including working and livestock animals, wildlife, and pets. We do this by focusing out charitable activities on three main areas:

- **Research**: Grant funding research which has a direct impact on animal welfare.
- **Education**: Investing in education for the public and veterinary professions, particularly students, on animal welfare issues.
- **Debate**: Providing a forum for discussion to highlight and promote animal welfare best practice.
Get involved in AWF

- Subscribe to our updates
- Host a talk and use our case studies
- Attend the Discussion Forum
- Take on the Vet School Challenge

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Thank you for taking part
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