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Economics and animal welfare in small animal veterinary practice: the case of genetic welfare problems

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Abstract

Veterinary practice is subject to veterinary surgeons' professional ethics, which ensure that patients' welfare is considered paramount and clients' interests are considered important. The provision of veterinary services is also subject to market forces that can affect transactions between clients and veterinarians. Veterinary markets could encourage or permit welfare harms due to potential market variations, imperfections and limitations, for example where financial constraints limit owners' willingness to pay for treatment or veterinarians' abilities to provide pro bono treatment. Consequently, economic factors could lead to potential welfare compromises through animals being undertreated, overtreated or mistreated. Fortunately there are possible solutions to these problems. Some are supplier-driven, for example improved the market functioning through transparency and honesty, strategically disrupting it through co-ordinating clinical standards and protocols or using veterinary authority to influence clients. Others are consumer-driven, for example improving consumer decision-making through the actions of insurance companies.

Keywords: *animal welfare, dog, economics, overtreatment, undertreatment, veterinary practice*