

VCSL



CODE OF CONDUCT  
FOR  
VETERINARY SURGEONS

**Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka**

**August 2025**

# **Code of Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons**



Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka

August 2025

This document on the Code of Conduct provides veterinarians in Sri Lanka with a set of guidelines to support sound decision making in the professional environment. The Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka strives to enhance moral standards that foster harmony among professional colleagues and elevate the reputation of veterinarians among clients and peers. The Council expects licensed members of this learned profession to abide by the principles outlined in this Code of Conduct and to practice with compassion and respect for animal welfare and public health.

First published: 2001

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: 2023

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: 2025

The Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka © 2025

Contributors:

Dr. A.D.N. Chandrasiri  
Dr. L.N.A. de Silva  
Dr. D.D.N. de Silva  
Dr. D.M.S. Munasinghe  
Dr. M.D.N. Jayaweera  
Prof. P.A.D. Alexander  
Prof. P.G.A Pushpakumara  
Dr. L.G.S. Lokugalappatti  
Dr. E. Rajapakshe  
Dr. P. Kumarawadu  
Dr. A.G. Liyanagamage  
Dr. K.A.C.H.A. Kothalawala  
Dr. R. Hettiarachchi  
Dr. N. Priyankarage

# CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	1
<b>GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT</b>	4
1. Acts Pertaining to the Veterinary Profession	4
2. Obligations of the Veterinary Surgeon as a Member of a Learned Profession	4
3. Infamous Conduct	4
4. Veterinary Services and Care in Animal Health and Production	5
5. Registration of Practice Premises	7
6. Canvassing, Advertising, Signboards, Nameplates, and Professional Stationery	7
7. Using Dr. as a Prefix	9
8. Change of Address and Contact Details	9
9. Media and Broadcasting	9
10. Testimonials	10
11. Scientific Articles	10
<b>RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE VETERINARIANS</b>	11
1. Obligations of Veterinary Surgeons to One Another	11
2. Consultations	11
3. Referrals and Second Opinions	12
4. Fees	13
5. Disputes	14
6. Records	14
7. Reporting of Malpractices	15
8. Continuous Professional Development	15
9. Influences on Judgement	15
10. Genetic Defects	16

<b>THE VETERINARY SURGEON AND THE COMMON LAW</b>	17
1. Prescribing and Dispensing	17
2. Animal Welfare and Ethical Responsibility	17
3. Confidentiality and Disclosure	18
4. Medical Record Retention	18
5. Issue of Certificates	19
6. Evidence	19
<b>APPENDIX</b>	20
1. Appendix I - Veterinarians' Oath	20
2. Appendix II - Euthanasia of Animals	21

## **INTRODUCTION**

A profession can be defined as a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to high ethical standards and uphold themselves to and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognized body of learning derived from research, education and training at a higher level, and who are prepared to exercise this knowledge and the skills in the interest of all the stakeholders. In a profession, guidelines generated with reference to a code of conduct govern the activities of that profession. Guidelines will require behavior and practice beyond the personal moral obligations of an individual.

The primary purpose of this publication by the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka (VCSL) is to update the standards and guidelines for professional conduct expected of registered veterinarians, as outlined in the oath (Appendix I). It covers the ethical responsibilities and activities of veterinarians, both individually and collectively, in their interactions with patients, clients, colleagues, and the wider community. Non-compliance with this Code of Conduct may result in disciplinary action by the VCSL.

Professional misconduct is defined as an act or failure to act by a veterinarian in the course of professional duties that may be seriously regarded as disgraceful or dishonest by colleagues of good repute and competence. This is especially significant when such conduct compromises public interest or the welfare of the patient.

Veterinarians are entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining and improving the health, welfare, and productivity of animals under all circumstances. However, evolving societal values, scientific advancements, and legal developments continually introduce new ethical challenges concerning animal care, often prompting reexamination of established ethical frameworks.

Veterinary surgeons have to safeguard the health and welfare of animals entrusted to their care. To fulfil their professional obligations, they must uphold five fundamental principles of practice:

1. Professional competence
2. Honesty and integrity
3. Independence and impartiality
4. Client confidentiality and trust
5. Professional accountability

The community and clients are entitled to expect that a veterinarian will consistently:

- a) Consider the respectful treatment of animals.
- b) Strive to provide the highest standard of veterinary services in animal health, production, and welfare.
- c) Offer guidance on the feeding, breeding, and management of animals.
- d) Uphold the reputation and integrity of the veterinary profession.
- e) Foster and maintain effective communication and relationships with clients, built on trust, empathy, and respect for confidentiality.

- f) Understand and comply with all laws of Sri Lanka relevant to the veterinary profession.
- g) Adhere to guidelines and recommendations issued by national and international authorities applicable to veterinary practice.
- h) Strengthen professional relationships with colleagues and share expertise where appropriate.
- i) Maintain and continually enhance professional knowledge and skills to improve the quality of services provided.

## **GENERAL CODE OF CONDUCT**

### **1. Acts Pertaining to the Veterinary Profession**

Every veterinary surgeon registered under the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka is expected to be familiar with all legislation relevant to the veterinary profession. This includes, but is not limited to:

- *Veterinary Surgeons and Practitioners Act No. 46 of 1956*
- *Animals Act No. 29 of 1958*
- *Animal Diseases Act No. 59 of 1992*
- *Animal Feed Act No. 15 of 1986*

### **2. Obligations of the Veterinary Surgeon as a Member of a Learned Profession**

As a member of a learned and skilled profession, the conduct of a veterinary surgeon must be governed by a more stringent code of ethics than that which applies to the general public.

### **3. Infamous Conduct**

3.1 Conduct regarded as infamous, in terms of Section 25 of the *Veterinary Surgeons and Practitioners Act No. 46 of 1956*, refers to professionally disgraceful behaviour. The Council shall determine, based on the facts presented, whether a registered veterinary surgeon is guilty of such conduct.

3.2 As a representative of the profession, a veterinarian should never refuse to advise a client or treat an animal. If unable to do so due to unavoidable circumstances, the case should be appropriately referred to a qualified colleague.

#### **4. Veterinary Services and Care in Animal Health and Production**

A veterinary surgeon must provide veterinary services and care that are appropriate and adequate. They are personally accountable for their professional practice and must always be prepared to justify their decisions and actions.

When providing services and care, a veterinary surgeon should:

- a) Take adequate and appropriate measures to restrain the animal, ensuring minimal stress and maximum comfort.
- b) Encourage clients to handle animals gently and safely, within the limits of prevailing circumstances.
- c) Implement the most appropriate and effective interventions to optimize animal health, productivity, and welfare.
- d) Offer and clearly explain a range of treatment options, including prognoses and potential side effects.
- e) Recommend appropriate preventive measures and provide effective management and treatment for disease conditions.
- f) Never allow or support animal suffering, regardless of the client's commercial, financial, emotional, or other circumstances.

- g) Obtain the client's informed consent to treatment unless delay would adversely affect the animal's welfare. Clients must be fully informed of the risks to give valid consent.
- h) Consider the welfare implications of any surgical or medical procedure involving animals and act or advise accordingly.
- i) Adhere to best practices for pain assessment and management. If termination of pain and suffering is warranted, euthanasia may be considered based on the animal's quality of life (see Appendix II).
- j) Promote humane handling and management of domestic, farm, feral, and wild animals. If culling or euthanasia is necessary, it must be conducted as humanely as possible, with due regard for both the individual and the group.
- k) Provide aid to sick or injured animals in emergencies, within legal boundaries and available resources.
- l) Ensure that the highest standards of animal management, handling, and analgesia are upheld at all times, including in research and teaching, in accordance with Sri Lankan law.
- m) Be responsible for the proper handling and storage of pharmaceuticals and biologicals, ensuring adherence to product recommendations. Special attention should be given to controlled substances with abuse potential.
- n) Provide appropriate guidance to co-workers on animal welfare and management within the workplace.
- o) Seek the advice of suitably trained colleagues, whether within or outside the practice, when novel or unfamiliar procedures are being considered or undertaken.

## **5. Registration of Practice Premises**

5.1 All animal holding facilities, clinics, and hospitals should be registered under the regulations of the *Animal Diseases Act No. 59 of 1992*.

5.2 All premises should conform to the conditions laid down in the regulations under the *Animal Diseases Act No. 59 of 1992*, as well as to the standards specified by the VCSL from time to time.

## **6. Canvassing, Advertising, Signboards, Nameplates, and Professional Stationery**

### 6.1 Canvassing

It is considered unprofessional for a veterinary surgeon to canvass or solicit for practice, either directly or through third parties.

### 6.2 Advertising

Advertising and publicity may take various forms, primarily aimed at disseminating information and attracting clients. All advertising and publicity must be:

- Professional, accurate, and truthful
- Limited strictly to the facilities and services offered
- Free from content likely to discredit the profession
- Respectful and non-misleading, recognizing that animal owners may lack veterinary knowledge.

Practice websites and professional social media pages should be regularly updated to reflect current services and standards.

### 6.3 Signboards

Veterinary surgeons must ensure that their premises are identifiable and accessible to the public. A single signboard may display:

- The designation: “Veterinary/Animal Hospital”, “Veterinary/Animal Clinic”, “Veterinary Surgery”, “Veterinary Clinic & Surgery”, etc., in an appropriate language
- Practising hours, attendance schedule, and, if desired, contact number
- Information on where veterinary assistance may be sought when the clinic is closed

No other information should be displayed on the signboard. Lettering should be in navy blue against a white background. The overall design must reflect professionalism and should not resemble commercial signage.

### 6.4 Nameplates

Veterinary service premises must bear a nameplate located on or adjacent to the building. It should only include:

- Name(s) of the veterinary surgeon(s) with corresponding VCSL registration number(s)
- Qualifications as listed in the latest Gazette of Registered Veterinary Surgeons in Sri Lanka
- The designation “Veterinary Surgeon(s)”

Each individual nameplate must not exceed 24" × 12" in size and must maintain a dignified and professional appearance. In group settings, proportional adjustments may be made.

## 6.5 Professional Stationery

Professional documents such as notepaper, invoices/receipts, and visiting cards should include:

- Name(s) of the veterinarian(s), qualifications, and VCSL registration number(s)
- Address details, main and subsidiary, if applicable

## 7. Using Dr. as a Prefix

A registered veterinary surgeon may use the title 'Doctor' or 'Dr' ('the title'). The veterinary surgeon should use their name, and the post-nominal letters of veterinary degree BVSc or equivalent.

## 8. Change of Address and Contact Details

Any change in the address and the contact details shall be notified to the Registrar of the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka. These changes may also be informed to the clients.

## 9. Media and Broadcasting

Contribution of articles, interviews, discussions, conferences, etc. in the mass media or social media is permissible provided it is clear that;

- a) Such a contribution is not inspired by a desire to promote the veterinary surgeon's personal interest.
- b) The action is not detrimental to the interests of the profession. While contributing to the mass or social media, the anonymity need not be maintained. However, one should not abuse one's position nor attempt to acquire personal publicity.

## **10. Testimonials**

It is considered unprofessional for a practising veterinary surgeon to provide testimonials intended for the sales promotion of proprietary articles, medicines, or animal feeds for commercial purposes.

## **11. Scientific Articles**

When a veterinary surgeon authors an article, it is deemed unprofessional for them to promote the reprinting of all or part of the article for use in advertising or selling any product to the general public. However, they may share the content with manufacturers or distributors to disseminate scientific or educational information.

## **RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE VETERINARIANS**

### **1. Obligations of Veterinary Surgeons to One Another**

Every veterinary surgeon is duty-bound to uphold the interests, honor, and dignity of the veterinary profession and to foster respectful professional relationships with peers. Interactions among veterinary surgeons must be grounded in integrity, mutual respect, and good faith.

### **2. Consultations**

If a veterinary surgeon, at the invitation of another attending veterinary surgeon, assists in the treatment or contributes to the diagnosis, prognosis, or therapeutic decisions in a case, the former may be regarded as a consultant.

Consultations may be initiated either by the attending veterinary surgeon or at the suggestion of the client. A consultant may participate only with the prior consent of the attending veterinary surgeon. When requested by a client, the attending veterinary surgeon should arrange for an appropriate consultation.

If the consultant examines a patient without the attending veterinarian present, they must promptly inform the attending veterinarian of the patient's condition, clinical findings, and their professional opinion.

### **3. Referrals and Second Opinions**

Veterinary surgeons should actively support a client's request for a referral or a second opinion from another veterinary surgeon.

A referral typically involves further evaluation, specific procedures, and/or treatment recommendations. Following the referral, management of the case should revert to the original veterinary surgeon unless otherwise agreed.

In contrast, a second opinion is sought solely to obtain an independent assessment or perspective without transferring case responsibility. Neither the second-opinion veterinarian nor the referral facility should take over the case unless the client chooses to change their attending veterinarian.

#### **3.1 When to Refer**

Veterinary surgeons should recognize the limits of their professional competence and be willing to refer cases or treatment options to suitably qualified colleagues when appropriate.

Referrals should be made with due consideration of the clinical needs and contextual factors surrounding the case. These may include the competence, experience, and available facilities of the referral veterinary surgeon; the urgency and complexity of the treatment required; geographical accessibility; and the specific circumstances of the client and patient.

In certain instances, if the veterinary surgeon determines that the nature of the case or the structure of the referral

arrangement is ethically or professionally untenable, they may choose not to participate in the referral.

The referring veterinary surgeon is responsible for ensuring that the client is informed of the qualifications and level of expertise of appropriate and reasonably accessible referral veterinary surgeons. This may include clarifying whether the proposed referral is to a veterinary specialist, advanced practitioner, or another suitable professional.

Both the referring and referral veterinary surgeons share the obligation to ensure that the client has a clear understanding of the potential costs associated with the referral process, including fees for consultations, procedures, and follow-up care.

### 3.2 Process of referring a case

The initial contact should be made by the referring veterinary surgeon, and the referral veterinary surgeon should be asked to arrange the appointment. The referring veterinary surgeon should provide the referral veterinary surgeon with the case history, treatments used and any relevant laboratory results, radiographs, scanning reports, etc. Any further information that may be requested should be supplied promptly.

## 4. Fees

Clients should be informed of the expected costs before any diagnostics or treatments are undertaken. Fees should be fair and reasonable.

## **5. Disputes**

Veterinary surgeons should strive to maintain collegial and respectful professional relationships. Disputes arising among veterinary surgeons should, wherever possible, be resolved amicably through direct communication and mutual understanding.

In instances where a resolution cannot be reached internally, the matter may be referred to the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka for guidance or mediation.

## **6. Records**

A veterinary practitioner must ensure that a comprehensive and timely record is made following any consultation, procedure, or treatment.

Records must be legible and detailed enough to enable another veterinarian to continue the animal's care without interruption. It must include findings from diagnostic tests, results of analyses, administered treatments, and any relevant observations.

If a record is subsequently amended, the modification must be clearly marked as such, maintaining transparency in clinical documentation.

All records of consultations, procedures, and treatments must be securely retained for a minimum period of three years from the date of creation.

## **7. Reporting of Malpractices**

A veterinary surgeon must uphold honesty and transparency in all professional interactions. It is the duty of veterinary professionals to report colleagues who exhibit deficiencies in character, competence, or ethical conduct to the relevant regulatory authorities. Allegations or observations of illegal practices must be reported to the Veterinary Council for appropriate investigation and action.

## **8. Continuous Professional Development**

A veterinarian shall demonstrate a sustained commitment to the pursuit, application, and advancement of scientific knowledge throughout their professional career. They should actively engage in ongoing veterinary medical education and contribute to the dissemination of relevant information to clients, colleagues, and the broader public to promote informed decision making and animal welfare. When appropriate, veterinarians must seek consultation or initiate referrals to ensure the highest standard of care is maintained.

## **9. Influences on Judgement**

The medical judgment of a veterinarian must remain independent and objective, uninfluenced by contractual obligations or agreements established by professional associations, societies, or external entities. Clinical decisions should be guided solely by the best interests of the patient and the informed consent of the client, following recognized veterinary standards and ethical principles.

## **10. Genetic Defects**

The performance of surgical or other procedures in any species for the purpose of concealing genetic defects, particularly in animals intended for exhibition, racing, breeding, or sale, is considered unethical. However, in cases where correction of such defects is necessary to safeguard the health or welfare of the individual animal, intervention may be justified. In such instances, it is recommended that the animal be rendered incapable of reproduction to prevent the perpetuation of heritable conditions.

## **THE VETERINARY SURGEON AND THE LAW**

Veterinary surgeons must be thoroughly familiar with and consistently adhere to all applicable legislation, regulations, and guidelines governing their professional conduct. They must not engage in clinical practice without being duly registered with the Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka.

### **1. Prescribing and Dispensing**

Veterinary surgeons must comply with all statutory provisions when prescribing, authorizing, or dispensing veterinary medicinal products and animal feed.

They must not misuse their authority to prescribe or acquire restricted substances, including drugs of addiction.

All written prescriptions must be legible, technically accurate, and free from promotional content related to specific products or commercial brands.

Prescriptions issued by veterinary surgeons must be genuine, complete, and compliant with recognized standards.

### **2. Animal Welfare and Ethical Responsibility**

Veterinary surgeons must be well-versed in the animal welfare legislation relevant to the jurisdictions in which they operate.

They should take reasonable steps to educate clients, employees, and other stakeholders involved in animal care about pertinent legal provisions.

Those engaged in research or teaching involving animals must be familiar with institutional animal ethics frameworks, relevant codes of practice, and applicable legislation.

### **3. Confidentiality and Disclosure**

While maintaining professional confidentiality, veterinary surgeons must do so within legal constraints and their statutory responsibilities.

Information concerning a patient under their care must be kept confidential and disclosed only to the owner, except with the owner's consent or where legal, regulatory, or public welfare considerations mandate disclosure, such as under the Animal Diseases Act or other legislative enactments.

If called upon to provide testimony (e.g., in court), veterinarians should disclose only information relevant to the case, clearly distinguishing factual evidence from professional opinion. Expert opinions should be confined to areas of recognized expertise and firsthand experience.

### **4. Medical Record Retention**

Veterinary surgeons are responsible for maintaining accurate, secure, and complete medical records of all consultations, procedures, and treatments for a minimum period of five years.

## **5. Issue of Certificates**

A veterinary surgeon is duty-bound in certain cases, when requested to do so, to issue certificates signed by him in his professional capacity for their subsequent use in the courts of law or for administrative purposes.

When issuing certificates for animals, all relevant identification details should be included wherever possible. The certificate must bear the veterinarian's signature and official stamp.

## **6. Evidence**

When a veterinary surgeon is called upon because of their professional status to provide evidence in a court of law, they must do so with the primary intent of assisting the judicial process and ensuring that justice is served.

If summoned by a party to a legal proceeding, the veterinary surgeon should testify in a professional capacity, upholding objectivity and integrity while aiding the court in its deliberations.

## **APPENDIX**

### ***Appendix I***

#### **VETERINARIANS' OATH**

Being admitted to the profession of veterinary medicine, I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills for the benefit of society through the protection of animal health, the relief of animal suffering, the conservation of livestock resources, the promotion of public health and the advancement of medical knowledge.

I will practice my profession conscientiously, with dignity and in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics.

I accept as a lifelong obligation the continual improvement of my professional knowledge and competence.

## ***Appendix II***

### **EUTHANASIA OF ANIMALS**

Euthanasia may be defined as ‘painless killing to relieve suffering’. Veterinary surgeons should be aware that these events are often highly emotionally charged. In these circumstances, small actions and/or omissions can take on a disproportionate level of importance.

Euthanasia is not, in law, an act of veterinary surgery, and may be carried out by anyone provided that it is carried out humanely. No veterinary surgeon is obliged to kill a healthy animal unless required to do so under statutory powers as part of their conditions of employment.

Veterinary surgeons have the privilege and responsibility to relieve animal suffering through euthanasia when appropriate. In general, only veterinary surgeons, or those acting under their direction, are authorized to access the controlled drugs commonly used for this purpose.

The primary purpose of euthanasia is to relieve suffering. The decision to follow this option will be based on an assessment of many factors. These may include the extent and nature of the disease or injuries, other treatment options, the prognosis and potential quality of life after treatment, the availability and likelihood of success of treatment, the animal’s age and/or other disease/health status and the ability of the owner to pay for private treatment.

## **1. Difficulties with the Decision**

Veterinary surgeons may face difficulties when an owner wants to have a perfectly healthy or treatable animal destroyed, or when an owner wishes to keep an animal alive in circumstances where euthanasia would be the kindest course of action.

The veterinary surgeon's primary duty is to relieve the animal's suffering; however, the animal's condition, as well as the owner's wishes and circumstances, should also be considered.

Refusing an owner's request for euthanasia may increase their distress and negatively affect the animal's welfare. If, on ethical grounds, a veterinary surgeon cannot comply with such a request, they must handle the situation with sensitivity and compassion and guide the client toward alternative advice or support.

If the request is due to financial hardship, the veterinary surgeon should, where appropriate, inform the client of any available charitable assistance or referral options for subsidized treatment.

If a veterinary surgeon is concerned about an owner's refusal to consent to euthanasia, they should offer guidance based on professional judgment and ethical responsibilities. When the refusal appears to compromise the animal's welfare, the veterinary surgeon must take reasonable steps to address the issue.

An appropriate initial step may be to recommend a second opinion, potentially through a telephone consultation with another veterinary professional. This approach can help the client make a more informed decision while remaining sensitive to the emotional nature of the situation.

## **2. Euthanasia without the Owner's Consent**

The Animal Welfare Act or any other act does not specifically authorize a veterinary surgeon to destroy an animal. Powers to destroy an animal, or arrange for its destruction, are conferred on an inspector (who may be appointed by the local authority) or a police constable.

A veterinary surgeon may be requested to certify that an animal's condition warrants euthanasia in its own best interests. However, in situations where there is no reasonable alternative to immediate destruction, and it is impractical to wait for a veterinary surgeon, an inspector or constable may act without a veterinary certificate.

A person responsible for an animal may be committing an offence if their actions or omissions cause unnecessary suffering. While owners are legally accountable, veterinary surgeons are responsible for inpatients under their care. If, in the surgeon's judgment, urgent euthanasia is necessary to prevent suffering, it may be performed without the owner's consent, provided the decision is well documented. Ideally, this should follow discussion with the owner and be supported by a colleague not directly involved in the case.

VCSL

# Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka

No. 68, Getambe, Peradeniya,  
Sri Lanka

Email: [registrarslvetcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:registrarslvetcouncil@gmail.com)

The Veterinary Council of Sri Lanka © 2025

