

Results of a survey of attitudes of dairy veterinarians in New Zealand regarding painful procedures and conditions in cattle.

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Abstract

AIMS: To quantify the range of attitudes and perceptions of cattle practitioners to painful procedures and conditions in cattle, to identify some of the demographic factors affecting those attitudes and perceptions, and to compare results from veterinarians based in New Zealand with those from the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe. **METHODS:** A questionnaire, based on one used for similar surveys in Europe, was sent to all 455 members of the Society of Dairy Cattle Veterinarians (DCV) of the New Zealand Veterinary Association. This questionnaire included a section on demographic data, e.g. gender, year of graduation, and pre-veterinary school background, and a section which asked the respondents to rate on a scale of 1 to 10 how painful they thought 24 procedures and conditions would be without any analgesia. **RESULTS:** A total of 166 questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 37%. From the range of procedures and conditions outlined in the questionnaire, those perceived as most painful were claw amputation, then Caesarean section, followed by surgery for left-displaced abomasum (LDA). The two least painful were mastitis with milk clots only, and the effect on a calf of dystocia. There were significant differences between the pain scores assigned by men and women and by respondents who had graduated in different decades. Female respondents and more recent graduates tended to give a higher pain score for most conditions. These effects remained, even after the potential interaction between age and gender had been assessed. The effect on pain score of either background or time spent treating cattle was much less marked than the effect of age and gender. Overall, the results were very similar to results from similar surveys undertaken in the UK and Europe. **CONCLUSIONS:** The responses to this survey indicate that, as in the UK and Europe, dairy cattle practitioners in New Zealand have a wide range of attitudes to pain in cattle. The estimates of the severity of pain were subjective, but such a survey allows the majority opinion of a considerable number of informed assessors to be quantified. **CLINICAL RELEVANCE:** The wide range of results suggests that more needs to be done to disseminate up-to-date knowledge of pain in cattle to veterinarians to ensure they provide appropriate levels of analgesia. In particular, the baseline data from this study can be used by practitioners to identify whether they are underestimating pain in cattle and, if they are, to assess whether they are using analgesia appropriately. Additionally, this dataset provides an informed and independent assessment of the pain associated with husbandry procedures, and could be used to better guide legislation concerning pain control of such procedures.