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Oregon surveys veterinarians about scope of illegal practice

Dec 1, 2011
By: Rachael Whitcomb
DVM NEWSMAGAZINE

SALEM, ORE. — Chiropractic treatment by non-veterinarians is believed to be the most common form of "illegal practice" in Oregon, according to a new survey of veterinarians by the Oregon Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA).

Nearly 88 percent of OVMA members who responded to the survey say they are aware of acts they consider illegal veterinary practice. Chiropractic treatment and anesthesia-free dental cleanings on companion animals topped the list and were cited by 50 percent of respondents.

However, chiropractic treatment is not illegal under the Veterinary Practice Act, according to the Oregon Veterinary Medical Examining Board, as long as it is in conformance with the rules governing veterinary practice and is performed by referral or as therapy specified by a veterinarian.

Another 35 percent of respondents reported they are aware of non-veterinarians administering vaccinations; nearly 28 percent reportedly have seen non-DVMs performing acupuncture and another 22 percent cited massage therapy as violations

to the state's practice act.

For horses, nearly 82 percent of respondents cite chiropractic treatments and teeth floating as the most common forms of "illegal practice," followed by massage therapy (42 percent) and physical rehabilitation (33 percent).

In food animals, pregnancy checks were the most often reported at 93 percent, followed by embryo transfers at 36 percent. About 14 percent of food-animal veterinarians reported chiropractic treatment and vaccinations by non-veterinarians could be in violation of the practice act.

Anecdotally, veterinarians say they have seen feed stores selling prescription medications for food animals without authorized prescriptions. They have also witnessed non-DVMs performing tail docking and castrations on companion-animals, and castrations on horses without anesthesia or sedation.

Most veterinarians—almost 94 percent—who responded to the survey say they heard about the illegal practice from clients while another 40 percent of respondents purport they witnessed violations first-hand. Another 26 percent of respondents

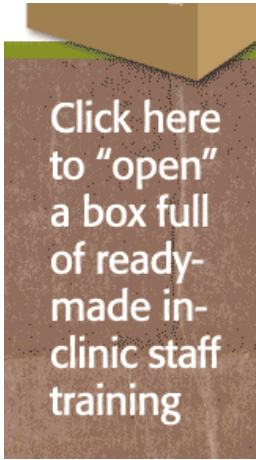
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report seeing fliers promoting services by non-DVMs and nearly 14 percent report they have seen advertisements for illegal services.

The majority of surveyed veterinarians—61.5 percent—say clients have not reported negative experiences when dealing with lay professionals offering animal-related services, but 38 percent of the respondents say they have provided follow-up care for animals injured due to treatment by non-veterinarians.

Oregon's survey is not the first attempt at documenting veterinarians' attitudes about lay professionals providing health services to animals. Last year, the California Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) conducted a similar study of its members. About 80 percent of those respondents believe they have encountered the illegal practice of veterinary medicine by non-DVMs.

CVMA Executive Director Valerie Fenstermaker told *DVM Newsmagazine* that enforcing practice-act laws are a challenge. In the Oregon study, veterinarians expressed concerns about reporting illegal practice, fearing non-veterinarian offenders may retaliate on their practice if charged with a crime.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) developed a new tool to track illegal practice. The database require veterinarians to input information regarding cases of suspected illegal practice with the hope that state regulators can use the database to follow-up on reports of illegal veterinary practice and build ammunition to lobby lawmakers for stronger language in veterinary practice acts. Forms to complete information for the database can be found at <http://avma.org/advocacy/state/issues/>.

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