

Evaluation of the Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics. Is there an urgent need for reform?

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Summary

The Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics is a set of ethical standards for the veterinary profession and a binding legislative act. The provisions of the code were analysed and interpreted, which revealed some of its provisions as flawed and identified various categories of flaws with respect to components requiring change. The results of this research demonstrate urgent need for a thorough reform of the code and suggest amendments. The article also discusses the guiding principle of professional ethics for Polish veterinarians.

Keywords: veterinary law, professional ethics, obligations

The Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics (2) is a set of ethical standards and deontological ethics and a moral philosophy that apply to the veterinary profession. However, it is not only a set of standards of conduct, but also a legislative act with force of law (2, 10, 17, 26, 29, 33, 38). It applies to all veterinarians in Poland from the moment they earn the right to practice this profession, bestowed by a resolution of the District Veterinary Council (33).

Therefore they are not merely recommendations, wishes, non-binding principles of good practice or rules to which one can, but does not have to, adhere (2, 8, 10, 15, 16, 26, 29, 33). On the contrary, adherence to the principles of professional ethics is mandatory for Polish veterinarians. Professional disciplinary hearings may be instigated for breaches of ethical standards. These are held before courts of the veterinary body corporate, which enforce rules in the same way as courts in criminal proceedings (15, 33, 38).

These rules are, as it were, standards of ethical conduct in the practice of the veterinary profession elevated to equivalence with legal norms and they are ratified in law (8, 10, 21, 30). It can therefore be concluded that ethics is very important not only scientifically and theoretically, but also practically, in the daily life and work of Polish veterinarians (10, 11, 24, 25, 31).

Veterinary professional ethics has a long history, dating back to a time in medicine as ancient as the

Hippocratic Oath. Similar rules apply to all veterinarians in different countries around the world (4, 5, 19, 27, 37), as well as to other professions in Poland, such as human physicians or pharmacists (1, 3, 8, 18, 23).

In Poland, the code of veterinary ethics and the associated professional responsibility are closely linked to and result from the recognition of the veterinary profession as one in which the public place their trust (2, 10, 11, 13, 33). A code is also one of the prerequisites for the existence of a veterinary professional body.

The Polish Veterinary Chamber was established by law in 1990 at the time of political changes following the fall of the communist regime (33). One of its duties is to have under its aegis the observance of professional ethics and the execution of the profession conscientiously, with due diligence and appropriately to the state of the art (33).

For such supervision to be possible, normative reference points are needed, which include the provisions of the code (as well as the scientifically sound principles of the practice of medicine). The professional body, therefore, has the statutory competence to establish veterinary service standards and deontological ethics binding on practitioners, as well as to use judicial and extrajudicial controls and to monitor how ethics are upheld (2, 15, 33). The Polish veterinary professional body is not subject to any external influence in the performance of its duties and is subject only to legal provisions at the hierarchical level of a legislative act

or higher (16, 33). This means that its actions must comply only with the constitution, international treaties and passed acts.

A code of ethics is an act of internal law (10, 17, 29), to which there are specific corollaries. First of all, the competence to adopt, amend and enforce the code is the province of the veterinary professional body. Secondly, it applies only to members of that professional body. Thirdly, it must comply with all provisions of national public law higher in the hierarchy of legal acts, e.g. the constitution, treaties and laws (10, 17).

The current version of the code was adopted in 2008 by the General Assembly of the Polish Veterinary Chamber (2), which is nominally the highest organ of the professional body. The Code of 2008 replaced previous regulations in this field. The over 15 years of its presence in the statutes and more than 30 years of the existence of such codes in post-transformation Poland provide a good standpoint from which to assess whether the principles of professional veterinary ethics in Poland are sound, good and effective. The soundness of standards depends on the values they focus on. In order for standards to be good and effective, the legal provisions from which they were interpreted must be good, well-constructed and well-written. This analysis is an attempt to verify whether these conditions are met.

Material and methods

The subject of research is the Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics (2). In addition, other Polish codes of ethics for the medical professions (human physicians, nurses, paramedics, and pharmacists) (1, 3, 18, 23), and other selected and representative foreign codes of professional ethics for veterinarians (4, 5, 19, 27, 37) were examined for comparison.

Juridical science methodology was used for analysis and interpretation of regulations – in particular, linguistic, logical, teleological, functional and comparative methods.

Results and discussion

The research distinguished two basic types of ethical codes, which differed in the method of assembling regulations. The first, a relatively rare one, is a brief and abstracted codification. The second is a long and casuistic codification, and it is more common, both in Poland and abroad. The Code analysed here falls somewhere between these types, although it may more readily be classified as the second one. It is assuredly not, however, a completely casuistic piece of legislation and contains many general standards, which should be regarded relatively favourably in a regulatory instrument. This scheme has been found to be typical of similar codes of ethics for other professions in Poland (1, 3, 18, 23).

The research nevertheless provided grounds to conclude that the current regulations are mostly poorly formulated and constructed, and that some of them also have substantive flaws. This makes it difficult

to correctly interpret the legal norms of these regulations and how they should be implemented by those subject to them (i.e. all veterinarians in Poland) and by the professional body responsible for supervision and enforcement of the law (i.e. the professional standards ombudsman and veterinary courts).

This can lead to dysfunction and situations unacceptable under a democratic rule of law (16). Thus, a veterinarian may misinterpret a standard and commit an act of professional misconduct, while believing to be acting in accordance with the law, which may even result in his losing the right to practice the profession. A peer tribunal could find a veterinarian guilty of violating some provision of the Code that is incompatible with a part of general law superior in the hierarchy or that restricts actions of a veterinarian in a way that is beyond the competence of the professional body. Other professional bodies have also encountered such problems when constitutional courts have ruled on their poorly written codes of ethics (10, 17, 23).

The analysis of the Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics and comparative analysis of other Polish codes of ethics of professions of public trust and foreign codes of veterinary ethics identified several problem areas and distinguished the following groups of provisions in the Code which are flawed as they currently stand:

1. Provisions that should unconditionally be removed from the Code immediately.

2. Provisions that should be modified: a) provisions with flawed wording, b) with flawed content, c) with flawed value attribution, d) with grandiloquent paragraphs.

3. Provisions that could be improved by amendment.

In the following part of this article, the characteristics of the Code for each of these groups and example provisions from each one will be described.

Provisions that should unconditionally be removed from the Code immediately. Some provisions should undoubtedly be struck from the Code immediately, because they fall outside the competence of the veterinary professional body or are contrary to law higher in the hierarchy. These rules can be considered illegal. In the author's opinion, these provisions can be postulated to be *per non est* (as if they did not exist) and treated as non-binding (as if they did not contain any legal norm content nor allowed the interpretation of any legal norm from them).

Article 8, section 2 is an example of a provision that exceeds the scope of the professional body's competence and is contrary to hierarchically superior law, including the Polish constitution. It rules that publications, such as scientific articles written by veterinarians in non-veterinary journals, may not contain content describing activities that only a veterinarian is authorised to perform. If the existence of a legal norm resulting from it were to be recognised, such a provi-

sion would constitute a violation of the freedom of expression guaranteed in the Polish constitution and in international treaties (6, 16, 32, 36).

It was further established by this evaluation that the professional body does not have the competence either to even set such a restriction or to set it with the applicability it has. Restrictions can only be introduced by parliamentary legislation and must not violate the fundamental core of an individual human right (16).

In addition, the provision can be demonstrated to err in what it attributes value to, since it presupposes the existence of some “secret veterinary knowledge”. Moreover, it is contrary to the statutory and ethical norm which says that veterinarians should propagate the knowledge of the law and the most current knowledge and good practices regarding the maintenance and care of animals (2, 10, 11).

Article 28, section 2 of the Code, which relates to professional confidentiality, was considered to exceed the competence of the veterinary professional body. It says that professional confidentiality is an obligation not only of the veterinarian, but also of his subordinate support staff. This definition of staff must be interpreted broadly: it applies to all people working in the clinic, such as veterinary technicians, receptionists, cleaners, secretaries, students gaining practical experience and volunteers.

But is such a regulation conceivable? It is not, for this reason: since the professional body brings together only veterinarians, its subsections can only lay down internal regulations for members of this professional body, and the professional ethical code of veterinarians applies only to veterinarians who have the right to practice (33). It does not even apply to graduates of veterinary studies who do not yet have the right to practice or who have lost it. Much less does it apply to other third parties.

This is a very particular and interesting case of a flawed ethical standard for several reasons. First, not the entire section 2 of article 28 deserves condemnation, but only its first sentence. The whole provision should nevertheless be amended and redrafted.

Second, this is not an isolated case. Similar regulations that exceed the scope of a professional body's competence and erringly apply more broadly than to a particular professional group have also been identified in foreign veterinary ethical codes and in other Polish ethical codes (4, 5, 19, 23).

Third and foremost, it concerns professional confidentiality as an ethical standard. This standard is one of the oldest and most important ones in the professional ethics of any medical profession, and it has a constant form since the time of Hippocrates of Kos (12). The professional confidentiality standard for veterinarians, as one deriving from article 28, section 1, and the first sentence of section 2 of the Code is *in principio* unarguably binding, sound, and must be applied, and this standard must be preserved.

What of the extension of the confidentiality obligation to third parties? In the author's opinion, regarding confidentiality as a moral value, it is relevant, purposive and justified that other persons be subject to this restriction as well. The purpose of the provision (*ratio legis*) is right, the solution is justified, but the method and means of implementation are wrong. The following change is necessary: the Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics should only contain the ethical standard for veterinarians themselves, while the legal confidentiality obligation of other persons, such as technicians, students and non-medical personnel, should be regulated by law.

There are also provisions that contradict statutory regulations or remain somehow outside them and unintegrated with them, such as article 21, section 2, which states that a veterinarian who has previously treated an animal is obliged, at the request of another veterinarian taking over the treatment of this animal, to provide him with all information and copies of any documentation concerning the previous course of treatment. In fact, the veterinarian is only allowed to provide this documentation to the keeper of the animal (35).

Another example is article 30, section 4. According to its wording, the veterinarian is to oppose inappropriate treatment of animals and use his powers to this end. In fact, unfortunately, veterinarians in Poland are not invested with any powers greater than those of ordinary citizens to protect animals from abuse (9, 34).

Any excess of law-making competences by the veterinary professional body and unconstitutionality of the corporate provisions constitute a gross violation of the law (understood as the entire system of norms, and not only individual statutory acts or paragraphs). Legal implications could be severe, as such regulations may be overturned by the Polish Constitutional Tribunal, and veterinary court judgments may be overturned by the Polish Supreme Court. The extra-legal implications may be even more damaging, because a court case of a veterinarian against a professional corporation regarding the unconstitutionality of the provisions of the Code of ethics could be exploited by the media. Thus the professional self-government might be exposed to ridicule, and public trust in the veterinary profession could be significantly weakened.

Provisions to be modified. The above are the most glaring examples of the flaws in the Code. Other defects are less obvious and less dangerous under the rule of law.

The second group distinguished here – regulations that need to be modified – includes several sub-categories: a) regulations with flawed formulation, b) with flawed content, and c) with flawed values. These are not separable sub-categories, because they partially overlap.

Flawed terminology and wording. Lexically flawed provisions are the most common in this group, since almost all provisions of the Code suffer from this

problem. They were found to be incompatible with the official policies of legislative technique in force in Poland (9, 39) and the principles of legal logic, or to use flawed, ambiguous legal terminology.

Often the rules do not provide a clear instruction on prescribed conduct, and it is unclear at first glance whether it is an obligation to proceed in a certain way or just a non-binding recommendation. This is exemplified by phrases such as “as far as possible should...” and “it is desirable...” in the oath and in article 6; article 12, section 2; article 13, section 2; article 15; article 30, section 1; and article 43 of the Code.

Undoubtedly, some of them are purely wishful thinking and unenforceable. Specific examples of such wishful thinking are article 34, which states that relations between veterinarians should be based on reciprocal goodwill, readiness to render comradely assistance and professional solidarity; and article 43, which states that more experienced veterinarians should help veterinary students and new entrants into the professional body to expand their knowledge and hone their skills, as well as model the ethical attitudes of novices after their own.

In the author’s opinion, attempts to remediate many of these provisions are pointless, because this matter is essentially unsuitable for legal regulation or legal enforcement. One cannot force anyone to be friendly. In cases of other aspirational, non-binding provisions, changes are possible. For example, it is possible to build an entire system that forces veterinarians to continue their education and an effective settlement system for the enforcement and execution of these obligations. Aspirational, non-binding rules should be converted into clear, practical and enforceable rules of the internal veterinary professional law. This, however, requires a number of additional extra-code regulations.

The terminology of the Code was found to be extremely imprecise, even when applied to most important issues, such as the definition of legal and ethical duties of veterinarians. For example, the same word, “should”, is used in the Code both in the sense of “has an obligation to” and in the sense of “is recommended to”.

Moreover, precisely the phrase “has an obligation” is used in article 37, but for reasons of functional, systemic and objective understanding, must be interpreted as “is recommended”. This article states that, when acting in a managerial capacity, the veterinarian has the obligation to ensure that his subordinate veterinarians raise their professional qualifications. However, the legal norm interpreted from it actually states that it is merely recommended for the veterinarian acting in a managerial capacity to ensure that his subordinate doctors raise their professional qualifications. In fact, there is neither a legal obligation to exercise such care, nor any real possibility to discharge it either by the veterinarian-manager or by his subordinates. That is not just because it is impossible to meet this obligation by, for example, sending veterinarians to training or

courses or encouraging postgraduate specialisation. It is a much more important and fundamental legal problem: no one can be legally bound to teach someone something or to successfully raise their qualifications (the subordinates can merely endeavour to learn and improve their qualifications).

Besides this article, a most flagrant example of the flawed terminology sub-category is the repeated mention in the Code of “the owner or keeper of animals”, which collides with Polish civil law terminology (34, 35).

The ambiguity of the Code terminology impacts on daily veterinary practice, although most veterinarians are probably unaware of it. Terminological differences have a severe impact on the liability of a veterinarian accused under an unclear provision.

As already indicated, this concerns primarily the double meaning of terms, especially terms such as “should”. Determining whether a specific provision of the Code is just a recommendation or a binding rule is of decisive importance in establishing the responsibility for behaviour inconsistent with a given norm and in deciding whether it should even be regarded as a norm.

Considering the current ambiguous wording of the Code, veterinary courts must always interpret its provisions *ad casum* to determine whether a given provision creates any legal obligation, and whether a given person acted in accordance with this obligation. This complicates the work of these organs. Moreover, it creates legal uncertainty that is unacceptable in a democratic system.

Flawed content. The next group comprises provisions whose flaw is the lack of substantive content not already written into law. It was noted that such provisions of the Code duplicate existing provisions of generally applicable law. Examples of such duplication are Article 5; article 10; article 12, section 1; article 13; article 15, section 3; article 16; article 19; article 22; article 23; article 25; article 29; article 36; article 38; article 39; article 42, section 1; and article 47 of the Code.

Such duplicative drafting unnecessarily increases the verbiage of the provision and may suggest that the sole source of a particular legal norm is the will of the professional body, rather than a generally applicable provision. The duties and entitlements of veterinarians described in these provisions actually have their primary sources in provisions of statutory and sub-statutory veterinary law (administrative and civil). It should also be noted that these sources are more important because they are superior in the hierarchy of legal acts. Repetition of the content of existing legislation is also unnecessary when peer tribunals adjudicate in professional liability matters, since these courts also rule on the basis of the Polish law regulating the veterinary profession (33). In the author’s opinion, this collection of regulations should be construed in a broad sense – as a source of all current legal norms in Poland making

direct reference to and directly related to the practice of this profession.

This sub-category of substantively flawed provisions includes those that may be incompatible with a hierarchically superior common law, for example, article 21, section 2, referred to previously, and article 35, both of which concern the communication of information by veterinarians consulting on a clinical case and the turning over of medical records. These provisions may conflict with provisions on the protection of clients under the data protection law, with the prohibition of violation of their personal rights and with the obligation of professional confidentiality (2, 12, 33, 38).

Another conflicting provision is article 42, section 1, concerning district veterinary officers who appoint general practitioners to perform official tasks, such as necropsy examinations or instigation of government measures to control infectious diseases. This provision may conflict with the principles of Polish and European law on appointment of public officers, although the extent of the conflict requires further research.

A further category of flaws diagnosed in this study is related to the value basis of provisions. The Code includes provisions that are devoid of a moral kernel, being completely unrelated to the sphere of ethics (e.g. article 5; article 10, section 1; article 17; article 23; and article 29). There are also items of the Code that can be interpreted as having a counter-ethical motivation (e.g. the first sentence of article 11, section 1 and article 40, section 1 and the first sentence of section 2) (28). The prohibition of advertising in article 7 of the Code also invites debate as to its value basis or substantive merit (20).

Redundant and unnecessary provisions, especially those duplicating general legal norms, indicate that the veterinary legislator was not fully aware that higher general standards were in force – and he should have known this. In the author's opinion, this situation should be remedied by amending the Code according to specialized legal knowledge and not solely the will of the professional legislative assembly whose legal expertise may not be adequate.

Grandiloquence. Numerous provisions of the Code can be condemned for their grandiloquence, verbosity and ostentation. The analysis carried out by the author showed that they are mostly devoid of actual normative content.

Mention can be made, for example, of article 6, stating that the participation of veterinarians in the activities of scientific societies and professional organisations is desirable, and that, whenever possible, they should publish their observations likely to be useful in veterinary science and practice in the professional press or disseminate them in any other form.

Another representative example is article 15, according to which the veterinarian should have a friendly and equitable attitude towards animals and should reduce the suffering of sick animals and strive to restore them

to health. This, after all, is the essence of clinical work in this profession, and not an ethical requirement.

A further example is the previously mentioned article 34, according to which relations between veterinarians should espouse mutual kindness, camaraderie, friendly assistance and professional solidarity. Article 30, article 43 or article 44 can also be cited as examples.

In the author's opinion, there is no need for concise alternatives of the above articles. Ethical guidance, which is undoubtedly intended by the professional body, can be provided without verbosity, unnecessary complexity or empty phrases, which make the actual enforcement of these regulations highly problematic because of their extreme vagueness.

In addition, this category can also include the use of pompous Latin paroemia, for example, in the second sentence of article 1 of the Code (23).

Rules that can be changed: guiding principle. The following part of this article deals with a separate issue, a rule that could possibly be considered for amendment in the future. The issue is so fundamental that it bears upon the most important rule in the whole system of professional and deontological ethics for veterinarians in Poland. It is the main principle of that system.

This rule is expressed in the second sentence of article 1 of the Code, which states that the overriding goal of all actions of the Polish veterinarian is always the good of man. As already mentioned, there is also the Latin paroemia *Sanitas animalium pro salute homini* in the Code. It means that the motives for ensuring the welfare and health of animals are the welfare and health of humanity, that the welfare and health of animals serve the welfare of humanity, that the welfare and health of animals are only means to an end, which is the welfare of humanity. This principle applies to all aspects of work in the veterinary profession: tending animal health, public healthcare and the veterinary scientific domains of environmental protection. These aspects are established by both the Code and the enacted law concerning the veterinary profession.

This is affirmed to be the highest law of the veterinary profession in Poland. It is also the main underlying value and the basic *ratio legis* of the law on the practice of the veterinary profession in Poland and the basis of all other veterinary and deontological ethical regulations. It is the main interpretative directive of all other provisions of the Code of ethics and (indirectly) the main interpretative directive of all other provisions on the practice of the veterinary profession in Poland.

It should nevertheless be noted that this is by no means a universal and transcultural principle. In other legal systems, especially the Anglo-Saxon one, the highest law of the veterinary profession is the welfare of animals (4, 5, 27, 37).

It was found that the main principle adopted in Poland has a real impact on the shape of other regulations, and, even more so, on the shape of legal norms

interpreted from them. An example corollary of the current form of the regulation is that the will of the animal's owner is always the decisive factor in Poland. A Polish veterinarian has no right to perform any diagnosis or therapy without the consent of the owner of the animal, even if the veterinarian infers from his knowledge that it would be beneficial for the animal or save its life. Such a position has its basis both in the provisions of Polish civil law and in the Code under analysis (2, 35).

Nevertheless, in the author's opinion, it is not the above example of the guiding principle's influence that is worthy of wider discussion or consideration when the Code of ethics is amended at some future time. Two main issues can be considered: First, is there any need at all for a guiding principle and highest law for the practice of the veterinarian profession or any need for a main interpretative directive? Second, should the guiding principle remain the current one?

It is a salient point when contemplating the first of the questions that not all codes of ethics for professions of public trust in Poland (18) and not all codes of veterinary professional ethics abroad have a defined highest law (19). It is true that in some codes there is an overriding principle – sometimes expressed explicitly, and sometimes implied – that can be interpreted from other rules, but this is not uniform or general. Therefore, the profession should consider abandoning the articulation of this kind of guiding principle.

As for the second of the questions, several arguments for and against can be made. The main argument against it is comparative. Other, foreign codes of veterinary professional ethics have a different guiding principle, which is animal welfare (5, 27). Among those examined, only the Polish code directly expresses the good of man as the higher principle.

Another argument, besides the outlier status of the Polish Veterinary Code, may be the risk that young veterinarians newly entering the professional body and the labour market will have different views to those dominant at the time when the Code under consideration was drafted. This is undoubtedly a manifestation of globalisation and standards of the Anglo-Saxon model of life and the Anglo-Saxon legal model becoming ubiquitous in all aspects of life. It is also a manifestation of changes in how society perceives animals and the veterinary profession. But above all, it is also the effect of changes occurring in the profession itself, such as a change in the profile of professional responsibilities or a change in the percentage of women in employment (14, 22, 31).

Be that as it may, this risk means that today's young veterinarians, who over time will constitute an increasing percentage of the entire professional body, will have personal views and moral values that are different from or contrary to those in the current legal and ethical norm and its foundation values. Therefore, they will not internalise this norm, and if they adhere

to it, they will only do so superficially, ostensibly and formally.

It is worth noting that this is only one facet of a broader reflection and of a more general legal problem, namely: should the law and professional ethics mirror the current will and value system of a group living under democratic sovereignty (i.e., in this case, the entire professional body, meaning all veterinarians in Poland)? The author's general answer to this question is affirmative.

On the other hand, the most important among arguments for leaving the current guiding principle unchanged is the fact that it is undoubtedly harmonious and consistent with the entire system of veterinary law in Poland, with the whole axiology of Polish law, and with the internal consistency of the Code under study. A change to this principle would result in the need to revise the entire Code and the entire veterinary law, as well as create inconsistency in the values upheld by the law, disharmony of the Code with provisions of laws, or inconsistency with the Polish constitution.

Unlike the earlier parts of the article in which specific cases were analysed and described, these paragraphs do not propose any amendment. The author is not attempting to judge whether the current principle is good and sound or not. Nor does he suggest or advance the case for its change, wanting only to open a debate on this issue involving scientists, the professional body and representatives of society. This is not a *de lege ferenda* postulate at the present time, because it unquestionably requires a broad, interdisciplinary and multidimensional discussion.

Recapitulation. This research made it possible to draw the following conclusions: Even after a very thorough analysis of the provisions of the Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics by elaborate methods of interpretation of the law, it proved very difficult to correctly interpret the legal norms of these provisions. This interpretation is difficult even for lawyers, let alone ordinary veterinarians, who are the subjects of this law. The analysis showed that many regulations are flawed, and therefore, at least a partial reform of the norms of veterinary ethics in Poland is necessary.

This reform should be undertaken urgently. For the law, including standards of professional ethics, to play a positive role and be observed and properly enforced, it must be good, that is, materially, formally and technically correct, as well as justified in the moral values it upholds.

The author's intention is not to propose examples of specific new regulations, because this article is intended to highlight basic problems and indicate general trends of desired changes. The amendment to the ethical Code must be a joint effort of the entire community of Polish veterinarians, with active consultation and co-operation of other groups of specialists.

Exclusive legislative competence in the field of professional ethics is provided for in an act of law for the

National Chamber of Veterinarians in Poland, where representatives from the whole country gather. With regard to conditions that law must meet to be good, the author paradoxically asserts that reform should not be left to the members of this chamber alone. The reform must be prepared by lawyers. This is necessary to ensure the formal and substantive correctness of the legislation. It may also be advisable to consult philosophers, ethicists and clergymen.

In addition, extensive consultation at the lowest levels with rank and file veterinarians is necessary. This is essential to ensure that the code of ethics reflects the views, morals and beliefs of the majority of Polish veterinarians, and does not exclude those of young practitioners and women.

Regarding the amendment, the author advocates reducing the number of provisions of the Code to “ten commandments”. A simpler and more concise drafting style for the Code should make it more accessible and understandable for Polish veterinarians.

The author also suggests that the content of these provisions be improved. The simplification of the Code must not trivialize or reduce the importance of veterinarians’ ethical responsibility towards themselves, the general public or animals. On the contrary, ethical legislation should focus on the most important problems of professional ethics.

As part of the streamlining, the idea is advanced of limiting the number and form of regulations and changing their content. This would simultaneously and cumulatively make them few, simple, understandable, general, abstract, non-casuistic, easy to remember, easy to interpret and easy to apply by each veterinarian. Thus reformed, the Polish Code of Veterinary Professional Ethics would be a good legal act and a sound set of moral values accepted and implemented by veterinarians.

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