

# Searching for the Animal of Animal Ethics

IX Annual Swedish Symposium on Biomedicine, Ethics and Society,  
11-12 June 2007



## **Ethical and sociological dimensions of animal pain management: Understanding perceptions of pain and treatment drivers**

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### **Abstract**

Through improvements in ethological and physiological characterisation of pain, we are increasingly understanding the scientific basis of animal wellbeing. However, if the alleviation of animal pain is identified as a key goal of current farm animal welfare programmes, then as well as improving scientific knowledge of nociception, we need to improve our understanding of the concept of animal pain and how this affects management strategies. Concepts of animal pain are a composite of sociological, ethical and scientific understanding. The decision to intervene and alleviate perceived animal suffering is mediated by the ethical standing of an animal, social factors, as well as the animal's behavioural and physiological indicators.

There is limited characterisation of factors that impact on professionals' understanding of animal pain and intervention decisions. A recent study highlighted the disparity between different veterinarians' perception of animal pain in cattle and the subsequent use of analgesics (Huxley and Whay, 2006). In addition, nearly two thirds of the veterinarians that took part in the study recorded that they gained their knowledge on animal pain thorough self-education, that is knowledge 'gained in practice'.

This paper will explore the way in which the concept of pain is socially constructed, the factors that impact on perceptions of animal pain and how this may influence treatment decisions. Gaps in the knowledge base from a multidisciplinary perspective will also be identified. It is hoped that greater understanding of the 'influential factors' will inform the development of 'good practice' approaches to pain relief in farm animals.

Huxley, J. and Whay, B. (2006) Current attitudes of cattle practitioners to pain and the use of analgesics in cattle. *Veterinary Record* 159(20) 662-667