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Liability of the Veterinarian in Malta

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Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
1.1. Contemporary ethical challenges in veterinary medicine	3
1.2. Objectives and method	5
2. Veterinary services in Malta	6
3. Legal system and veterinary authority in Malta.....	8
3.1. Qualifications of the veterinarian in Malta.....	9
3.2. Ethical code.....	10
4. Professional liability in veterinary medicine	16
4.1. Allegation and outcome	17
4.2. Standard operating procedures of the MVSC disciplinary committee.....	17
4.2.1. Formation of the disciplinary committee	17
4.2.2. Composition of the disciplinary committee	18
4.2.3. Duty and remit of the disciplinary committee	18
4.2.4. Outcome of allegation	19
5. Veterinary indemnity insurance in Malta	21
6. Case studies	22
6.1. Cases of allegations against veterinarians in Malta	23
7. Conclusions.....	37
8. Summary	39
9. References.....	41
10. Acknowledgments	43

1. Introduction

The last three decades have been marked by a great deal of progress and innovation that has revolutionised the way the world operates. Technological advancement has time and time again pushed the boundaries of what we can achieve as human beings. The veterinary profession has benefited greatly in the process, allowing veterinarians to give animals the best care possible [1]. However, these benefits are a double-edged sword, exacerbating the challenges faced by veterinarians more than ever before [2].

Built into the very essence of the professional role of a veterinarian is a conflict; they serve both animals and humans. Almost every decision a veterinarian takes involves moral choices that stem from this conflict [3]. Each scenario a veterinarian faces on a day-to-day basis presents a wide range of choices that can be made, resulting in a great deal of stress, as any choice can have dire ethical and legal consequences. In addition to this, a veterinarian is expected not only to have technical competence, but also goodness of purpose as part of their mission. Society requires a profession that can solve problems concerning an animal's health, while also expecting to meet the needs of both the animal and its owner simultaneously, presenting a dilemma requiring a balance between the two parties involved [4].

Veterinary ethics is a vital part of veterinary medicine, guiding veterinarians towards making the right decisions when dealing with clinical cases, and thus, diminishing the chance of them facing preventable allegations from their clients or even their own colleagues [5]. In addition, failing to employ mature ethical reasoning can result in the neglect of the veterinarian's duty towards the animals being treated. Veterinary ethics needs to be given more importance in veterinary curricula, and the ethical frameworks already in place should be enhanced to address the ethical issues that are encountered on a regular basis [4]. Lastly, it was stated by a joint report of the 'Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE)' and the 'European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EA EVE)', that in order for a veterinarian to be a good clinician, one must be aware of the decision-making involved in everyday practice [6].

1.1. Contemporary ethical challenges in veterinary medicine

As highlighted previously, people are now experiencing a life of relative comfort and financial security which has never been seen before in the history of the world. This has created new challenges that require ethical questions to be answered [5]. These challenges come from within and without the veterinary profession, putting under scrutiny the profession's oldest and most important values. The elevation of status of companion animals is one of these challenges, which has been aided by the increase in disposable income available to be spent on animals kept as pets. Dogs, cats, birds, horses, and exotic animals are now considered part of the family and thus have access to healthcare equal or better than that of most human beings [5] [2]. This has certainly not been the case in the past, where animals were only viewed as a source of income or manual labour. This is still the case in farm animal medicine, even though measures are taken to ensure the welfare of farm animals is upheld to achieve peak production. It has only been as recently as the 1970s that veterinarians have considered the ethical issues involving animal use and welfare [7].

The summation of all these factors has produced a society that is willing to pay for good quality veterinary care for its beloved pets. This has not only made the industry better, but it has also made it more expensive, which in turn means clients have higher expectations when it comes to treatment success rate. In addition, expensive veterinary care has put more pressure on the veterinarian when it comes to dealing with clients that do not have the necessary funds to treat their pet [2]. Furthermore, a veterinarian is expected to not only have a good, broad level of knowledge to treat an animal, but also needs to be empathetic and have the ability to employ moral and ethical values as the foundation of his or her professional work. A veterinarian seems to always be in a constant struggle between professional obligation and personal morality [4]. A survey of North American veterinarians conducted in 2018 showed that over 70% of the respondents felt that obstacles that held them back from providing appropriate care caused them, and their staff, moderate to severe distress. In addition, this same survey noted that more than 70% of the participants reported that they were given no training in conflict resolution or self-care [8].

Moreover, it is no secret that the rise of social media has made it much easier for people to give their opinions on any subject, especially negative ones [9]. This has played a part in the rate of suicide in the veterinary profession, which is twice that of the medical profession, and four times the rate in the general population [10]. Veterinarians are constantly put under scrutiny from dissatisfied clients filing allegations against them. This is also the case in Malta, where veterinarians deal with the court of public opinion on a frequent basis. This results in a heavy toll on mental health, especially since a lot of allegations are rooted in misinformation and lack of knowledge on the matter. Veterinarians need to build a relationship of understanding and trust with the public to increase empathy towards veterinarians. However, this is easier said than done, requiring cooperation between the veterinary profession as a whole and the community it is in service to [9]. The public need to understand that veterinary professionals need to make a living through the services they give to the public. On the other hand, they cannot guarantee good results, no matter the cost of treatment [11].

1.2. Objectives and method

The subject of ethics and law in veterinary medicine has always been of interest to me, especially since it does not always seem to be given the importance it deserves in the veterinary field. I decided to work on this thesis because I had seen countless comments on social media defaming the profession of veterinary medicine in Malta, with the main criticism being that veterinarians are only interested in making profit rather than the wellbeing of animals. These opinions made me wonder if anything is being done to ensure that veterinarians in Malta fulfil their obligation towards animals, clients, and the community, to rebuild a strong bond between veterinarians and society that seems to have dwindled.

My goal for this thesis is to shed light on the importance of veterinary ethics in not only preventing professional liability, but also in assuring that veterinarians give a service to society that is of the standards expected. I want this thesis to be a reference point for new veterinary graduates to learn about the ethical challenges they should expect and the responsibilities that are expected of them by society. In addition, I wanted to evaluate the system put in place in Malta that deals with upholding the ethical standards of veterinary medicine in the country. I also wanted to evaluate how the Maltese legal system functions when a veterinarian is professionally liable and how well it protects the practitioner when they are falsely accused. To achieve this objective, I contacted the ‘Malta Veterinary Surgeons’ Council (MVSC)’ and took part in several interviews with them where I was given information regarding such disciplinary cases, which will be presented later.

In this thesis, one will find a brief introduction to the history of veterinary medicine in Malta and its current state today. Subsequently, I will talk about the Maltese legal system with regards to veterinary medicine and its ethical code. Lastly, I will present ten cases of allegations filed against veterinarians in Malta, with the focus being the process and the verdict, with the purpose of highlighting the importance of the MVSC’s work and discussing what can be improved to maintain and elevate the standards of veterinary care in Malta.

2. Veterinary services in Malta

The Maltese veterinary profession has always had a great part to play in public and animal health. Although Malta has no veterinary university currently, the veterinarians that have practiced on the Maltese islands throughout the years have kept zoonotic diseases like rabies at bay since 1911 [12] [13]. In addition, other zoonotic or devastating diseases that had managed to enter the islands, like foot and mouth disease in 1975, were successfully eradicated. This set an example that was applied throughout all of Europe, helping the continent to eradicate the disease completely [14] [12]. Malta was the first country, prior to entering the European Union, to eradicate both brucellosis and tuberculosis. It also applied micro-chipping of livestock for controlling brucellosis which is now applied in many European countries [12] [15].

According to the MVSC's records, the first official registration of a veterinarian in Malta was made on the 28th of December 1959. Two lists were used, one for those who studied in commonwealth countries, and one for those who did not, due to Malta being under British rule till 1964. This is not to say that there were no veterinarians in Malta before this time, however, they were mostly British veterinarians from the military. By the 1980s Malta only had 15 warranted veterinary surgeons, today, that number has increased drastically to 185 registered veterinarians, either with permanent or temporary warrants, mostly working in the 34 registered private veterinary establishments and 20 consultancy practices. Unfortunately, the only veterinary hospital available on the islands has closed down at the time of writing this thesis [16].

In the past, veterinarians in Malta started off working with equine patients and livestock, providing an efficient service to Maltese farmers from the 1980s to 2000. Unfortunately, there are almost no veterinarians willing to work with farm animals today due to the fact that it is tiresome work and far less profitable than working with companion animals [17] [18]. In fact, one will notice while reading this thesis, that there have been no complaints made to the MVSC regarding a farm animal. In addition, the 'Malta National Statistics Office' conducted a census of Agriculture in 2020 highlighting the general decline in agricultural labour force and animals being reared. The number of cattle farms decreased from 291 to 241 from 2010, with a cattle

population of 14,447 which declined by 7.9%. The only increase in reared animals was seen in sheep, goats and laying hens [19].

Nowadays, the veterinarians warranted in Malta mostly work with small animal and exotic patients, where the working hours are flexible with secure pay. There are also several state veterinarians working to protect public health. In addition, there are also a handful of equine veterinarians as it is a profitable industry [17]. With the number of dogs, cats and horses standing at 85,079, 11,673 and 5,506 respectively in 2021, it is clear that Malta has embraced completely the idea of animals kept as companion animals [20]. Furthermore, there are 397 wild animals kept in captivity in Malta, including 64 tigers, 24 pumas and 20 lions. Although the keeping of these animals is very controversial due to concerns regarding welfare, they still require veterinary care [21].

3. Legal system and veterinary authority in Malta

Because veterinary medicine is regarded as a profession, it has ‘Aesculapian authority’, which refers to the trust granted to the healing professions, in this case, the belief that veterinarians have a moral duty as animal healers [22]. This authority comes with the expectation that the profession is responsible for the self-regulation and education of its members, the veterinarians. This involves creating two sets of standards to be upheld: professional competence and professional ethics. Society has a legal and moral right to competent veterinarians of good moral character [5].

These expectations were first imposed upon the veterinary profession by the government of Malta through the ‘Medical and Kindred Professionals Ordinance, 1901 (Chapter 31)’, which included the veterinary profession with all the other medical professions on the island. In 2001, Act 23 of 2001 was passed which was then amended in 2002 to become ‘Veterinary Services, 2002 (CAP. 437)’ to “establish and consolidate the requirements in the veterinary field, veterinary medicinal products, feeding stuffs and zootechnical requirements and for the regulation of the veterinary profession” [23]. Although a Maltese veterinary regulatory body already existed, Part VI of the ‘Veterinary Services Act’ officially established the ‘Malta Veterinary Surgeons’ Council (MVSC)’, having 8 members in total; the chairman and director, two members appointed by the prime minister, one of whom being a veterinary officer. Lastly, four elected members, of whom two are veterinary surgeons with experience in working with small animals and another two having experience working with large animals. These members are elected for a term of three years by secret ballot, voted for by veterinarians residing and practicing in Malta [23].

The MVSC was thus entrusted with regulating the veterinary profession in Malta by carrying out several duties. Some of these duties include acting as a licencing board, granting, suspending, or withdrawing warrants completely if needed. According to Chapter VI: point 42 of the ‘Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)’, the MVSC shall also “prescribe and maintain professional and ethical standards for the veterinary profession and professions and trades supplementary to the veterinary profession”. In addition to this, the Veterinary Surgeon’s

council has the duty of planning professional training of veterinary surgeons and carry out proficiency tests for private veterinarians in private veterinary activities [23].

3.1. Qualifications of the veterinarian in Malta

The ‘Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP.437.43)’ underlines what is needed for someone to be qualified as a Veterinarian in Malta:

“No person shall practice as a veterinary surgeon unless (a) he holds a warrant to practice from the President of Malta; and (b) his name is registered in the Veterinary Surgeons’ Register.

Warrants shall be granted to any applicant who produces a certificate issued by the Council showing that the Council is satisfied that the applicant

(a) has graduated in veterinary medicine and surgery, having a degree or formal qualification recognised by the Council, after consultation with the Malta Qualifications Council and in terms of the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Act and legislation made thereunder, as being comparable to the degree or formal qualification, in the subject, in Malta, or in a Member State, and in trading partners;

(b) is of good character.

(c) is in a state of good physical and mental health.

(d) is a citizen of Malta or of a Member State or is otherwise legally entitled to work in Malta” [23].

3.2. Ethical code

The MVSC created the ‘Malta Veterinary Surgeons’ Council’s Guide to Professional Conduct’ to identify “the key responsibilities of veterinary surgeons to their patients, clients, the public and professional colleagues, as well as their responsibilities under the law”. This document was created by using the ‘Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons’ (RCVS)’ ‘Code of Professional Conduct’ as reference [24]. The fundamental principles in this document are expected to be “applied to all areas of veterinary practice” [25]. The introduction to this guide highlights the expectation of accessibility, transparency, and accountability from a self-regulating profession like veterinary medicine to protect the public interest. It is also mentioned that being able to practise as a veterinary surgeon is a right. In exchange for this right, every veterinary surgeon registered in Malta is obligated to observe this guide and adhere to it diligently [25]. Suffice to say that abiding by these guidelines is paramount in preventing a veterinary surgeon from being liable in any shape or form. The following are the guiding principles of the code:

“Veterinary surgeons must:

1. make animal health and welfare and veterinary public health their first consideration in seeking to provide the most appropriate attention for animals committed to their care
2. ensure that all animals under their care are treated humanely and with respect
3. maintain and continue to develop personal professional knowledge and skills
4. foster and maintain a good relationship with clients, earning their trust, respecting their views, and protecting their confidentiality
5. uphold the good reputation of the veterinary profession
6. ensure the integrity of veterinary certification
7. foster and endeavour to maintain good relationships with other professional colleagues
8. understand and comply with the obligations in relation to the prescription, safe-keeping, and supply of veterinary medicinal products

9. observe the relevant legislation in relation to veterinary surgeons as individual members of the profession, employers, employees, and business owners
10. respond promptly, fully and courteously to complaints and criticism” [25].

In addition to the guiding principles, the ‘MVSC’s Guide to Professional Conduct’ also lists the responsibilities veterinarians have towards their patients, clients, the public, colleagues and the law. A veterinary surgeon must follow these responsibilities when any animal is in his or her professional capacity:

- “1. Treat all patients of whatever species humanely and with respect.
2. In practice, make adequate arrangements for the provision for emergency cover.
3. After taking into account the patient’s age, the extent of any injuries or disease and the likely quality of life after treatment, make a full and realistic assessment of the prognosis and the options for treatment or euthanasia.
4. All efforts should be made to provide suitable options in such a way as to avoid unnecessary suffering of the patient if an owner cannot afford treatment.
5. Maintain proper standards in the practice premises and equipment, and in relation to animals.
6. Prescribe medicinal products responsibly.
7. Not cause any patient to suffer:
 - a. by carrying out any unnecessary mutilation
 - b. by excessive restraint or discipline
 - c. by failing to maintain adequate pain control and relief of suffering
 - d. by neglect” [25].

Moreover, as mentioned previously, veterinary surgeons are not only in service to animals. They are also in service to the people that own them, which comes with its own set of responsibilities and ethical challenges [5]. The following are the responsibilities a veterinarian has towards a person that asks for his or her professional service:

“1. The provision of veterinary services creates a contractual relationship under which veterinary surgeons should:

- a. ensure that clear information is provided about practice arrangements
and on how to obtain out of hours attention
- b. take all reasonable care in using their professional skills to treat patients
- c. keep their skills and knowledge up to date
- d. keep within their own areas of competence. However, when a veterinarian is
confronted with an emergency situation which is not of his competence s/he
should make all necessary efforts to provide aid.
- e. maintain clear, accurate and comprehensive case records
- f. ensure that a range of reasonable treatment options are offered and explained,
prognoses and possible side effects
- g. give realistic fee estimates based on treatment options
- h. keep the client informed of progress, and of any escalation in costs once treatment has started
- i. obtain the client’s consent to treatment unless delay would adversely affect the animal’s
welfare
- j. recognise that the client has freedom of choice” [25].

“2. The professional/client relationship is one of mutual trust and respect, under which a veterinary surgeon must:

- a. maintain client confidentiality
- b. treat the client with respect, and observe professional courtesies
- c. avoid conflicts of interest
- d. give due consideration to the client’s concerns and wishes where these do not conflict with the patient’s welfare
- e. provide fully itemized accounts if requested.
- f. not participate in any division of fees of which the client is not aware.
- g. communicate information in a way that is understood by the client, especially in cases where any mistakes could lead to serious consequences. In the case that the veterinary surgeon and the client do not speak the same language, it is the responsibility of the Veterinary Surgeon to ensure effective communication. If this is not possible, then the veterinary Surgeon should not take responsibility for the treatment of the client’s animals, except in an emergency situation” [25].

Furthermore, the veterinary profession has a “vital role to play in the education and protection of animal welfare and public health” according to the MVSC’s ‘Guide to Professional Conduct’. The veterinarian’s responsibility towards the general public includes, but is not limited to, the prudent use of medicine in food-producing animals, reporting any suspected occurrence of notifiable disease or adverse reaction to medication, and the promotion of responsible animal ownership while providing factual information to the general public and co-operating with colleagues and other health professionals when appropriate [25].

When it comes to collegiality between veterinary professionals, veterinarians must always cooperate by sharing relevant clinical information upon referral of a case, while also ensuring that referrals are made responsibly. In addition, it is important to note that a veterinary surgeon must never “speak or write disparagingly about another veterinary surgeon” or “obstruct a client from seeking a second opinion” [25]

Lastly, veterinary surgeons must also adhere to the following guidelines when it comes to their responsibility towards the law:

“1. Veterinary surgeons should be sufficiently familiar with and comply with relevant legislation including:

- a. the Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP 437) and associated Regulations and statutory instruments arising out of Maltese Law and EU Legislation
- b. the Medicines Act 2003 (CAP 458) and associated legislation as it applies to the use, prescription, sale and supply of veterinary medicinal and related products
- c. the Data Protection Act 2004 (CAP 440) as they apply to professional and client records
- d. Employment, Inland Revenue, VAT and Social Security legislation as it applies to veterinary practice
- e. the Animal Welfare Act 2002 (CAP 439) and associated Regulations and statutory instruments arising out of Maltese Law and EU Legislation
- f. the Services (Internal Market) Act, 2009 (CAP 500) and associated Regulations and statutory instruments arising out of Maltese Law and EU Legislation, as it applies to veterinary practice
- g. any other relevant animal health or welfare legislation relating to animal health,

disease control, animal breeding, public health and zoonoses arising out of Maltese Law and EU Legislation.

2. the Prevention of Disease Ordinance, 1908 (CAP 36) and associated Regulations and statutory instruments arising out of Maltese Law and EU Legislation

3. Veterinary surgeons must be aware of their responsibilities as witnesses to fact, as professional witnesses, or as expert witnesses in any civil or criminal proceedings in which they may be involved.

4. Veterinary practices should carry third party insurance for the protection of the public” [25].

4. Professional liability in veterinary medicine

In Malta, veterinarians are rarely taken to court due to expensive legal fees. However, it does happen occasionally, as a client has the option to bypass the MVSC regulatory board and go straight to court for financial compensation. On the other hand, allegations made through the MVSC regulatory board have become more common [16]. Veterinarians must not ignore the possibility of being professionally liable, not only because it is in their best interests as it could lead to the revocation of their licence to practice, but also because it is expected of them to act in the best interest of the people and animals they serve [5]. Furthermore, there seems to be a close correlation between the quality of the veterinarian-client relationship and the likelihood of the client filing a malpractice claim against the veterinarian [11].

The most common allegations of liability against veterinarians are malpractice and negligence. Liability is one of the most important terms in the field of law. The term refers to the legal responsibility for one's acts or omissions. Failure to meet that responsibility leaves the offender open to a lawsuit for any resulting damages [26]. Malpractice is defined as "an act or continuing conduct of a professional which does not meet the standard of professional competence and results in provable damages to his/her client or patient". Such an error can happen through negligence, ignorance or intentional wrongdoing [26]. Examples of malpractice in veterinary medicine include prescribing the wrong medication to a patient or course of treatment. On the other hand, negligence is defined as "the failure to behave with the level of care that a reasonable person would have exercised under the same circumstances. Either a person's actions or omissions of actions can be found negligent" [27]. An example of negligence in veterinary medicine would be failing to monitor the patient while under the veterinarian's care.

In conclusion, veterinarians can face either a malpractice or negligence claim. They are both considered to be based on negligence but the main difference between the two claims is that malpractice is based on lack of professional knowledge that leads to harming a patient. A negligence claim does not deal with professional knowledge but rather an avoidable unintentional mistake [28]. Veterinarians in Malta can also be accused of animal abuse under the 'Animal Welfare Act, 2002 (CAP. 439)'. This law defines the ill treatment of animals as

“causing the animal to suffer, by any act or omission, pain or distress which in its kind or degree, or in its object, or in circumstances in which it is inflicted, is excessive or unnecessary” [29].

4.1. Allegation and outcome

As mentioned earlier, the ‘Maltese Veterinary Surgeon’s Council (MVSC)’ is responsible for dealing with allegations filed against veterinarians practicing in Malta. The MVSC forms a disciplinary committee, when necessary, to review and investigate a single complaint or request for investigation according to the ‘Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)’ [23].

4.2. Standard operating procedures of the MVSC disciplinary committee

The following section will describe the standard operating procedures (SOPs) of the MVSC’s disciplinary committee once a complaint against a veterinarian has been received.

4.2.1. Formation of the disciplinary committee

For the formation of the disciplinary committee (DC), certain requirements need to be met. Firstly, a request for investigation must be received in writing from a named individual, clearly calling for an investigation and/or disciplinary action involving an individual entity that falls under the remit of the MVSC. In addition, documentation and written permission to collect all relevant documentation must be provided by the complainant. Lastly, the MVSC or its chairman will decide whether there is a clear request for investigation and/or disciplinary action, a clear and actual charge that is being made that can be decided upon objectively through the collection of evidence. The individuals involved must also fall under the remit of the MVSC [16].

Once these requirements are met, the potential members to form part of the disciplinary board are proposed and approved by a simple majority. The proposed persons will then be asked to

confirm whether they will accept the duties of the DC within a given timeframe. Those that accept the duties are asked to sign an agreement which includes confirmation of knowledge of their responsibilities to the council and the profession, declaration of no conflict of interest, acceptance of rules regarding data protection, and a commitment to meet as and when necessary, within a reasonable timeframe. Once sufficient proposed DC members have accepted to form a DC, the MVSC chairman will inform the DC chairman, in writing, that the DC has been formed, the composition and roles of the members involved, and the date by which the DC is expected to complete its role and report back to the MVSC [16].

4.2.2. Composition of the disciplinary committee

The disciplinary committee (DC) is composed of at least three warranted veterinarians, and where possible and necessary, a warranted lawyer or equivalent to act as legal advisor. At least one warranted veterinarian on the DC must have at least three years of experience in a branch of veterinary medicine relevant to the case in question [16].

4.2.3. Duty and remit of the disciplinary committee

The disciplinary committee has a 4-stage duty:

- “1) Deciding the facts charged; what is being charged and can be supported by evidence
- 2) Deciding whether facts proved amount to misconduct
- 3) Recommending the outcome or sanction.
- 4) Reporting all findings and conclusions to the VSC for approval” [16].

All these duties must be done in a fair and timely manner with respect for the rights of all involved and with consideration for the reputation of the profession. Being able to effectively self-regulate its members is key for the MVSC. The disciplinary committee is responsible for finding evidence of guilt, the defendant is not required to prove his or her innocence. This is done by first determining which charges can be found to be proven factual. Then, the most difficult task of all, the DC must determine whether the facts provable by reliable evidence suggest professional misconduct. This task should not be taken lightly. While the DC must be fully prepared to conclude misconduct where appropriate, it must be equally ready to accept when available evidence is insufficient to reach an objective conclusion [16].

4.2.4. Outcome of allegation

As stated earlier, the veterinarian must always be considered innocent until proven otherwise. The MVSC's 'Guide to Professional Conduct' states that "veterinary surgeons must respond promptly to any request from the MVSC for comments in relation to any allegation or complaint made against them" and be "prepared to explain and justify their professional activities". Veterinary surgeons must also be aware that they can be reprimanded or removed from the Veterinary Surgeon's register if found guilty of breaching any conditions stated in the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP 437)', if convicted in Malta and abroad of a criminal offence, or if found guilty of disgraceful conduct by the disciplinary committee. Such disgraceful conduct includes "acts of immorality, indecency, dishonesty or abuse of professional relationship, forgery, fraud, embezzlement, cognate offences, and prolonged neglect of duties and disregard of responsibilities to patients, clients and the general public " [25].

Once the process highlighted in the previous section is complete, the disciplinary committee is responsible for recommending the outcome or sanction to the MVSC, as also stated in the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)' [16][23]. The following are a list of recommendations that may be made by the VSC:

- “1) Revocation or suspension of warrants
- 2) Terms and means of communication to involved parties
- 3) Financial penalties
- 4) Further legal action
- 5) Imposition of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) or other education
- 6) Dismissal of the case on grounds of insufficient evidence
- 7) Handing over the case to another authority” [16].

While conducting interviews with the MVSC, it was pointed out that the ‘Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS)’ in the United Kingdom is their point of reference when it comes to regulating the veterinary profession in Malta, emphasising their plan to someday reach the RCVS’s level of severity when it comes to suspension of warrants. Currently, the MVSC only gives out a maximum of 3 weeks suspension of one’s warrant for the gravest breaches of the code of professional conduct. However, they plan to increase that suspension gradually until they reach a point where they will be able to impose a 2-year suspension to a veterinarian’s warrant if they see fit. This will be accomplished by slowly elevating the standards of care expected of veterinarian’s in Malta by the MVSC [16].

5. Veterinary indemnity insurance in Malta

In Malta, there are less than a handful of private insurance companies offering veterinarians professional indemnity coverage [16]. Veterinary surgeons require insurance for multiple reasons. Firstly, they need insurance because it is a legal obligation stated in ‘Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)’. In addition, and most importantly, it provides financial aid to veterinarians that have been sued [30]. I contacted one of the insurance companies in Malta offering professional indemnity to veterinary surgeons for further information about the policies offered. The policy indemnifies a veterinary surgeon for compensatory damages, legal defence costs and expenses incurred in relation to claims made against the veterinary surgeon during the period of insurance for the following:

- “- Professional negligence;
- Breach of professional duty of care;
- Breach of professional confidentiality; and
- Defamation in good faith ” [31].

However, the basic policy does not cover veterinary surgeons that practice equine medicine. That requires an extended policy which is more expensive. The basic policy only covers veterinary surgeons practicing small animal medicine. The policy also does not cover the death, bodily injury or illness to any person or physical loss or damage to property, unless arising from the professional services as a veterinary surgeon [31]. Therefore, in cases where veterinarians receive a warrant suspension, the policy does not cover financial losses during that period.

6. Case studies

The following cases are complaints filed against veterinarians practicing in Malta, dealt with by the MVSC. Given the small size of the Maltese islands, the number of these cases is very low compared to other European countries. There have been 20 cases that have been closed so far since the MVSC's inception in 2002, however, there are 9 cases that are currently still open, showing that as time goes by the complaints went from few and far in between to becoming a regular occurrence today. The number of cases in the past amounted to less than two a year, nowadays the MVSC receives, on average, two complaints a month [16].

In this section, I will present some of the different allegations put forward against veterinarians practicing in Malta, provided by the 'Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council (MVSC)'. Each case will start with a short description, highlighting the form of complaint and allegation, the type of liability involved and the outcome that was decided by the MVSC. A summary of the complaint filed to the competent authority will also be provided.

6.1. Cases of allegations against veterinarians in Malta

Case 1

Complaint	Civil, made by veterinarian
Allegation	Ethical Misconduct
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Ethical: Putting the veterinary community in disrepute by criticizing another veterinary establishment on social media
Outcome for the Animal	N/A
Verdict	Disciplinary action in the form of a one-week suspension

Case presentation:

A complaint was received by the 'Malta Veterinary Surgeons' Council (MVSC)', from a veterinary surgeon (Vet A) against another veterinary surgeon (Vet B). Vet B had written a post on social media criticizing Vet A, putting the veterinary profession in disrepute. Vet B wanted to buy medicinal products for his/her own pet from Vet A as it was a Sunday, and therefore, all the vet pharmacies were closed. Staff at Vet A's veterinary establishment refused to sell medicinal products to Vet B since the animal was not brought to the clinic and had not been seen by the vet on duty at the time. Vet B felt offended and resorted to complaining against Vet A and his/her veterinary establishment on social media. Vet A reported the case to the MVSC [16].

The Disciplinary committee found that Vet A was not guilty of wrongdoing. This is because the normal procedure, as set by the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)', is that veterinary surgeons can only dispense medicinal products to patients under their care [23]. Vet B had not asked to speak to Vet A or to the vet on duty at the time. Therefore, Vet A and Vet B never actually spoke. The Disciplinary committee recommended a reprimand to Vet B, asking Vet B to formally apologize to Vet A on the same social media forum. Vet B had his/her warrant

suspended for a week as the MVSC felt that it was a serious breach of ethics and found this to be disgraceful conduct. The ethical code was later updated by the MVSC because of this case [16].

My opinion on this case is that the MVSC was justified in handing out a one-week suspension to Vet B as his/her actions were unprofessional and inexcusable, especially when considering that Vet A had acted in accordance with the legislation regarding dispensing of medicinal products. Vet B could have possibly defamed not just Vet A and his/her veterinary establishment, but also the veterinary profession in Malta in general. Vet B failed to “uphold the reputation of the veterinary profession” and also failed to “foster and endeavour to maintain good relationships with other professional colleagues”, as stated by the MVSC’s ‘Guide to Professional Conduct’, by writing disparagingly about another veterinary professional [25].

Case 2

Complaint	Civil, made by the MVSC
Allegation	Practicing without warrant
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Legal
Outcome for the Animal	N/A
Verdict	Six-month suspension to the warrant application and fine of 5500 Euro

Case presentation:

This case is unique as it involves an investigation that was initiated by the MVSC itself. The MVSC complained that a veterinary surgeon had applied for a Warrant to practice in Malta whilst already offering the service illegally. An advertisement was followed, and with the help of the Administrative Law Enforcement Unit of the Police, the veterinary surgeon was caught red-handed working without a warrant and was subsequently taken to court. The veterinarian in question broke point 43 of the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)' that states that no person shall practice as a veterinary surgeon unless he/she holds a warrant to practice from the president of Malta and his/her name is registered in the Veterinary Surgeons' Register [23]. A fine of half the maximum allowed by law was issued to the offender and the MVSC also imposed a six-month suspension of the warrant application, the veterinary surgeon in question paid the fine of 5500 Euro and refrained from returning to Malta prior to obtaining a warrant [16].

In this case, the offender had obtained a warrant from another country, which meant that he had the minimum qualifications and professional knowledge needed to be able to practice as a veterinarian, he/she were only guilty of not applying for a Maltese warrant. The difficulty with catching people working as veterinarians without qualifications or warrant is that one must catch them in the act or have proof that they caused injury to an animal because of their negligence. This is easier said than done however, as there are some people who are allegedly working as veterinarians in the equine industry without qualifications according to the MVSC [16].

In my opinion, the MVSC acted well in investigating this case. Although as mentioned earlier, the offender in question was in fact qualified as a veterinarian, it is important for the reputation of the veterinary profession to uphold the law when it comes to practicing as a veterinarian in Malta. This case was used as a warning to anyone that would attempt to offer veterinary services without a warrant or qualifications. Lastly, it is of the utmost importance, for the welfare of the animals, that the people allegedly working as veterinarians without qualifications are apprehended and taken to court.

Case 3

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Administering medication to the wrong patient
Outcome for the Animal	Possible health risk to the patient which was wrongly medicated
Verdict	Reprimand and change in SOPs

Case presentation:

A complaint was received by the MVSC about the way dogs were being taken care of in a veterinary establishment (Establishment B). A dog had been diagnosed with Parvovirus enteritis at establishment A and was referred to establishment B as the facilities were better equipped to deal with this highly contagious viral infection. The owner of the dog complained to the Council because when he/she went to pick up his/her dog, the nursing staff gave back a dog that was not his/hers. In addition, the dog that was presented to the owner had been administered the last treatment dose that was prescribed for the owner's dog [16].

The disciplinary committee held the licence-holding veterinary surgeon at establishment B responsible for this error. As the Council is also responsible for trades and professions ancillary to the veterinary profession, as stated by the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437. 42)', the nurses involved were also reprimanded [23]. The licence-holding veterinary surgeon was also asked to update standard operating procedures (SOPs) as well as to update the internal protocols at establishment B to ensure that a similar incident could not repeat itself. These protocols and procedures needed to be presented to the MVSC for approval [16]. Thankfully, this case resulted in no harm to the animal that was given medication meant for another patient, however, it is vital that mistakes like these are never made to keep the patients safe and uphold the reputation of the veterinary profession. This was a very unprofessional error that could have easily been prevented, not giving a warrant suspension was justified.

Case 4

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice, Negligence
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Failing to shave the area before suturing
Outcome for the Animal	Infected suture area
Verdict	Three-week suspension and obligatory CPD

Case presentation:

The MVSC received a complaint from a stray cat feeder stating that a cat he/she fed on the street had a wound just above the eye that needed suturing. Therefore, the cat was picked up by 'Animal Welfare', the government department responsible for the wellbeing of all animals in Malta and taken to Vet A for treatment. After the cat was released back in the street, the stray cat feeder noticed that the sutured area was showing signs of infection, therefore, he/she brought the cat to Vet B personally. Vet B noted that the sutured area had not been shaved prior to the suturing procedure [16].

The veterinary surgeon who had carried out the suturing in the first instance (Vet A) was brought before the MVSC's Disciplinary committee. Since there was no scientific justification for suturing a wound without shaving, even though the area was disinfected, Vet A was asked to follow a CPD course on treatment of open wounds that had to be approved by the MVSC beforehand and had his/her warrant suspended for three weeks [16].

In this case, Vet A acted negligently when it came to properly preparing the area around a wound for suturing. By leaving hair around the sutured area, Vet A put the patient at risk of infection that subsequently materialised into reality. The VSC was justified in suspending his/her warrant for 3 weeks and prescribing a 'Continuing Professional Development (CPD)' course on wound treatment as he/she showed a lack of basic knowledge in this area of veterinary medicine and breached the MVSC's guiding principles which states that veterinary surgeons must maintain and continue to develop personal professional knowledge and skills, and also keep within their own areas of competence [25].

Case 5

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Surgical error
Outcome for the Animal	Death of the patient
Verdict	Three-week suspension and mandatory CPD

Case presentation:

This case involved the death of a female dog after being spayed. The veterinary surgeon in question had been found to have accidentally punctured the patient's spleen during the intervention. This surgical error had resulted in bleeding from the organ. The bleeding was subsequently stopped, and the surgical procedure continued as normal. However, the patient did not make a full recovery post-operatively, failing to go back to the normal range of temperature as expected. The veterinary surgeon in question had not assumed that this complication might have been caused by the internal bleeding from the spleen that had re-emerged. Unfortunately, this resulted in the death of the patient and a necropsy was performed confirming the internal bleeding from the spleen [16].

The owner of the patient filed a complaint to the MVSC on grounds of professional malpractice and for not disclosing the events completely to the owners. The disciplinary committee recommended a three-week suspension and a mandatory CPD course [16].

The veterinary surgeon in this case failed to adhere to the MVSC's code of professional conduct by not taking all reasonable care in using his/her professional skills to treat the patient in question. In addition, the offender kept the owner in the dark regarding what had transpired during the surgical procedure, breaking the contractual relationship between him/her and the client [25]. Although one is never immune from making mistakes, especially in a highly stressful job like that of a veterinary surgeon, there are ways in which one can resolve accidents when they happen. In this case, the veterinary surgeon failed to perform a splenectomy that might have saved the patient's life.

Case 6

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Extracting all the teeth of the patient without consent
Outcome for the Animal	All teeth completely extracted
Verdict	Veterinarian found not guilty

Case presentation:

A complaint was received by the MVSC where an owner of a dog asked the regulatory board to investigate a veterinary surgeon that had extracted all the teeth of her dog that was only a few years old. The complainant claimed that no communication was held between her and the veterinary surgeon and that she had not authorized such an intervention, she had only requested a dental cleaning to be performed on her dog. During their investigations, the disciplinary committee found that the veterinary establishment had advised the owner many times to take the dog for dental cleaning as it was long overdue. When the situation had deteriorated, the owner booked the dog for teeth cleaning. Due to the grave state of the dog's teeth, the veterinary surgeon had explained that there might be the need to extract some teeth if they become too loose after the cleaning process. Unfortunately, that turned out to be the case, and all the teeth had to be extracted, to the owner's displeasure [16].

A written consent form with all the explanations needed had been signed by the owner. Detailed records kept by the veterinary surgeon on the condition the teeth were found in and the reasoning why the teeth were extracted were also presented to the disciplinary committee. The veterinary surgeon was found to have acted in the best interest of the dog and within the proper procedures. The complainant was informed that the MVSC found no evidence of wrongdoing from the veterinary surgeon [16].

The MVSC was justified in waiving the complaint because the veterinarian in question acted in the best interest of the patient and used the law to safeguard himself from professional liability by issuing a consent form that was signed by the owner. Although a veterinarian should always recognize that the client has freedom of choice, exerting influence over the client in order to safeguard the patient's wellbeing might be legitimate as long as it is done only for the benefit of the animal [32]. In conclusion, this case highlights the importance of good communication between the veterinarian and the client when it comes to achieving valid informed consent, as according to a paper published in 2018, owner consent cannot be used to ethically justify allowing certain procedures to be done [33].

Case 7

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Ethical Misconduct, Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Poor treatment of the client, failing to give a consent form for surgery
Outcome for the Animal	N/A
Verdict	Veterinarian found not guilty

Case presentation:

In this case a stray cat was taken to a veterinary establishment by someone who wanted to get it neutered using the government voucher scheme available for stray cats, this person was not the legal owner of the cat. A complaint was made to the MVSC that he/she was treated differently than other paying customers because of the use of the government voucher which meant that he/she was not a paying customer. In addition, the complainant noted that he/she was not given a consent form to sign before the procedure [16].

This case never materialized into anything because in order to be given a consent form, according to the law, one must be the owner of the animal, which was not the case here. Therefore, the disciplinary committee formed by the MVSC could not find evidence of wrongdoing. However, this does not mean that the client lied about his/her mistreatment. Veterinarians should always ensure that all animals are treated equally and with respect, if they are owned by a paying customer or not, as stated by the MVSC's 'Guide to Professional Conduct', this also applies for the clients [25].

Case 8

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Administering euthanasia incorrectly
Outcome for the Animal	Possible unnecessary pain to the patient
Verdict	Veterinarian not found guilty

Case presentation:

Case 8 is another example of an alleged veterinarian that was ultimately not found guilty of professional misconduct. An owner brought his/her dog to a veterinary establishment to have it humanely euthanised. The veterinarian proceeded to use the intracardiac technique when administering the euthanasia, which elicited signs of pain from the dog due to the burning sensation of the euthanising agent. This was obviously very distressing to the owner. The owner complained to the MVSC that there was some sort of wrongdoing when administering the euthanasia and that it was animal cruelty [16].

The disciplinary committee found the veterinarian not guilty of malpractice as the intracardiac route for administering euthanasia is a useful alternative technique for performing humane euthanasia in pets, especially if the intravenous route access is limited or difficult. However, according to the 'American Veterinary Medical Association's Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals', it is essential to ensure that the patient to be euthanised is at a surgical level of anaesthesia, sedation alone does not suffice [34]. If this part of the procedure was overlooked by the veterinarian, then he would have been in breach of the ethical code that states that veterinarians "must not cause any patient to suffer by neglect or by failing to maintain adequate pain control and relief of suffering" [25]. In addition, the veterinarian in this case could have also possibly failed to prepare the owner for the procedure by not describing what he/she can expect to happen when administering the intracardiac euthanasia.

Case 9

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Prescribing medication at a higher dose than the recommended dose
Outcome for the Animal	Possible side effects due to overdose
Verdict	Veterinarian not found guilty

Case presentation:

Case 9 involves a veterinarian that was accused of prescribing a Doxycycline dosage that was higher than the recommended dosage on the product's packaging. The owner accused the veterinarian of malpractice; however, the product manufacturer had stated that although the antibiotic in question has a recommended dose, it does not mean that it is the maximum dosage allowed or that a higher than dose is dangerous to the patient. The veterinarian used his/her knowledge and experience using the drug to condone the use of a higher dose as it was successful in the past without any side effects. This was found to be reasonable for the MVSC, therefore, the veterinarian was not found guilty of misconduct [16].

This case is another one which highlights the importance of communication between the veterinarian and the client. With today's technology, information is easily accessible, meaning that clients can and will use the internet to gain knowledge about their dog's health problems. It is understandable that an owner will be worried about his/her dog's prescribed medication if he/she had found that the prescribed dose was higher than the one recommended. However, the veterinarian could have either explained this before prescribing the medication to keep the owner informed or the owner could have brought up this issue personally with the veterinarian in question before filing a complaint to the MVSC. The veterinarian acted in accordance with the 'Veterinary Services Act, 2002 (CAP. 437)' when it comes to dispensing medicinal products and did not breach the ethical code, the correct decision was made by the MVSC [23] [25].

Case 10

Complaint	Civil, made by owner
Allegation	Malpractice
Responsible Authority	Malta Veterinary Surgeon's Council
Liability	Improper use of equipment while carrying out internal fixation surgery
Outcome for the Animal	Amputation of patient's hindlimb
Verdict	Three-week warrant suspension for Vet A

Case presentation:

This case involves a dog owner that complained to the MVSC requesting reimbursement for the fees paid for his/her dog's care after complications with the pet's limb fracture that led to it being amputated. The patient in question was a small breed dog that had its left hind leg broken. The owner took the dog to the veterinarian (Vet A) who used plates that were too short while carrying out the procedure of fracture fixation. After the procedure, the dog was taken home with orders to cage rest. However, the owner only complied with these orders for two days, after which he/she let the dog out to play with the other dog in the household which was substantially bigger. The result of this was that the small breed dog fractured its hind leg once more, prompting the owner to take it back to Vet A, where he/she was offered to reoperate but ultimately refused. The owner then resorted to taking his pet to veterinarian B (Vet B), where another procedure was attempted to no avail. There was no other option but to amputate the pet's limb after this failed attempt. The MVSC did not give compensation to the complainant, however, Vet A was given a three-week warrant suspension [16].

It can be observed that the MVSC does not deal with financial compensation when it comes to the allegations made against veterinarians. For someone to get financial compensation for malpractice or negligence, one must open a civil court case in the court of law against the veterinarian, which would require more expensive legal fees than the fees already paid by the owner. However, Vet A was still guilty of malpractice as he/she opted for a shorter plate than the one required for fracture fixation of the patient's hind leg. Vet A could have also opted to abide by the 'MVSC's Guide to Professional Conduct' which orders veterinary surgeons to stick

to his/her area of competence and refer the case to another veterinarian when he/she noticed that they did not have an adequately sized plate to fix the fracture [25]. Therefore, Vet A was handed a three-week warrant suspension [16]. In addition, although the first mistake was done by Vet A, the owner was also guilty of not abiding by Vet A's orders to cage rest the patient for the fracture to repair itself. This might have prevented his/her dog from having its hind leg amputated. This case is currently under appeal.

7. Conclusions

Our main goal as veterinarians is to be of service to society by treating animals in the best way possible. This can be achieved not only through our professional knowledge, but also by using moral and ethical thinking as the foundation of our work as veterinarians. Nowadays, advanced medical care and changing views on animals have introduced more ethical challenges to everyday practice. With society's rising demands placed on veterinarians at an all-time high, it is of the utmost importance to safeguard the veterinary profession, and the people that form part of it, by regulating the profession in a way that maintains and increases the standard of care provided to animals. This will help achieve good relations between society and the veterinary profession, where clients are more empathetic towards veterinarians because they are aware of the moral and mental distress they experience regularly. In addition, veterinarians also have a part to play in this by doing their best to ensure that all animals under their care are treated well while also balancing the owner's needs. The role and importance of a veterinarian should not be taken lightly by society and the veterinarians themselves.

During my research, I was surprised to observe that even for a small country like Malta, the legal system and regulatory body of the veterinary profession are very comprehensive and competent when it comes to veterinary services and the regulation of it. I was also pleasantly surprised to see that clients can make allegations against a veterinarian if they believe he/she is guilty of malpractice or negligence, with the frequency of these allegations increasing yearly. Furthermore, it was good to see that veterinarians are also given the required protection when falsely accused due to lack of information or knowledge. When it comes to veterinarians that were guilty of malpractice, the penalty system is lenient, only giving out a maximum of three-weeks warrant suspension for the gravest of offences. In my opinion, this seems to be too lenient for certain offences, especially since there are multiple cases where a three-week suspension was given that have varying degrees of severity. The MVSC pointed out that this maximum penalty will gradually be increased up to 2 years, but time will tell if this will be successfully put in place.

The increased number of allegations made against veterinarians is the result of society's changing views on animal keeping and care. The advancement of technology has also opened

the door for better veterinary care, making it less affordable in the process. This has caused significant moral and mental distress to veterinarians in Malta and worldwide as clients tend to think that expensive cost of care must always result in guaranteed success of the medical treatment. On the other hand, a positive aspect of these allegations is that veterinarians can learn from their own mistakes and those of others, something which is not being utilised currently as the information about the cases are not shared with the public or other veterinarians, unlike what is done in the United Kingdom under the RCVS. In conclusion, the veterinary profession has become more complex and demanding, and one remains to see what other changes could be implemented that change the way professional liability is dealt with in the veterinary profession. In the meantime, our goal is clear, to uphold the highest level of moral and ethical standards that best serve animals and society.

8. Summary

This thesis investigates the professional liability of the veterinarian in Malta with regards to the legal and ethical point of view that go hand in hand. The ethical challenges faced by veterinarians today because of the changing times are discussed in detail, and there is a subsequent review of the veterinary services in Malta, from past to present, and an overview of the legal system in Malta that deals with veterinary services. The Maltese veterinary regulatory board is also introduced, and an examination is made on its duty and work to uphold and enhance the standards of the veterinary profession in Malta.

Furthermore, the MVSC's ethical code is described, highlighting the veterinarian's responsibility towards patients, clients, colleagues, the public, and the law. In addition, standard operating procedures when an allegation against a veterinarian is made, are described, and evaluated. An overview of the possible types of allegations are also described. The Outcome of these allegations are discussed, these are then followed by a short description of veterinary indemnity insurance cover in Malta.

Lastly, a case presentation involving 10 cases is described in detail, illustrating the variety of allegations faced by veterinarians in Malta. The goal of this case presentation is to highlight the most common challenges veterinarians face in day-to-day practice, and to evaluate the MVSC's role in protecting the interests of the clients, the animals, and the veterinarians as well.

Összefoglaló

A dolgozat a máltai állatorvosok szakmai felelősségét vizsgálja jogi és etikai szempontból, amelyek kéz a kézben járnak. Részletesen ismerteti azokat az etikai kihívásokat, amelyekkel az állatorvosok szembesülnek a változó idők miatt, és bemutatja a máltai állat-egészségügyi szolgálat működése a múlttól napjainkig, valamint az állat-egészségügyi szolgáltatásokra vonatkozó máltai jogi szabályozást. Továbbá bemutatja a máltai állat-egészségügyi szabályozó testületet, annak feladatait és munkáját az állatorvosi szakma színvonalának fenntartása és javítása érdekében.

Ismertetésre kerül az MVSC etikai kódexe is, kiemelve az állatorvos felelősségét a betegekkel, ügyfelekkel, kollégákkal, és a társadalommal szemben. Ezenkívül bemutatja az eljárási rendet, amennyiben felmerül az állatorvosok felelőssége működésük során. Ismerteti azokat az eseteket, amikor a szakma szabályai sérülnek, és megvitatja azok lehetséges következményeit. Végül az állatorvosi felelősségbiztosításról esik szó.

Legvégül egy összesen 10 esetet magában foglaló esetbemutató található, amely illusztrálja a máltai állatorvosok elleni különböző eljárásokat. Az esetbemutató célja, hogy rávilágítson az állatorvosok mindennapi gyakorlatában felmerülő leggyakoribb kihívásokra, valamint felmérje az MVSC szerepét az állattulajdonosok, a kezelt állatok és az állatorvosi szakmai társadalom érdekeinek védelmében.

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Thesis progress report for veterinary students

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 Thesis title: Liability of the veterinarian in Malta

Consultation – 1st semester

Timing				Topic / Remarks of the supervisor	Signature of the supervisor
	year	month	day		
1.	2023	02	16	Objectives, requirements	
2.	2023	03	16	Literature review I.	
3.	2023	03	31	Literature review II.	
4.	2023	04	14	Legislative background I.	
5.	2023	05	12	Legislative background II.	

Grade achieved at the end of the first semester:5 (jeles).....



Consultation – 2nd semester

Timing				Topic / Remarks of the supervisor	Signature of the supervisor
	year	month	day		
1.	2023	09	21	Professional liability	
2.	2023	09	29	Case presentations I.	
3.	2023	10	17	Case presentations II.	
4.	2023	10	30	Conclusions.	
5.	2023	11	03	Final checks, corrections,	

Grade achieved at the end of the second semester:5 (jeles).....

The thesis meets the requirements of the Study and Examination Rules of the University and the Guide to Thesis Writing.

I accept the thesis and found suitable to defence,

.....
signature of the supervisor

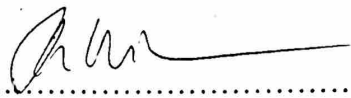
Signature of the student:

Signature of the secretary of the department:

Date of handing the thesis in.....13 November, 2023.....

I hereby confirm that I am familiar with the content of the thesis entitled „Liability of the veterinarian in Malta” written by Neil John Cutajar which I deem suitable for submission and defence. I declare that the thesis has been successfully checked for plagiarism and that any matches found comply with the University guidelines/rules.

Date: Budapest, 10th November 2023



.....

Dr. Csintalan Csaba.....

Supervisor name and signature

Department of Veterinary Forensics and
Economics