

## Foreword

### Lord Soulsby of Swaffham Prior

Advances in veterinary medicine and surgery now allow interventions to cure or alleviate disorders of animals unthought of only a decade or so ago. Many of these follow advances in the human field, including therapy for cancer, joint replacement and transplantation made possible by developments in anaesthesia, immunosuppression, antibiotics and other supportive technologies. An increasing number of veterinary surgeons are acquiring skills to address reparative procedures which are carried out not only at centres of surgical excellence such as veterinary schools but also in general practice facilities. What might have been described hitherto as heroic is now increasingly commonplace and moreover requested by owners, especially of companion animals. However, the question often raised is that of the ethics of subjecting an animal to major surgical or medical intervention to gain a few years of additional life and, importantly, the quality of life experienced thereafter by the animal.

This was the focus of the recent debate in the British Veterinary Association on the transplantation of kidneys in cats, both with respect to the donor cat, left with a single kidney, and the recipient cat with the necessity for prolonged immunosuppression to prevent rejection of the transplanted kidney. The quality of life experienced by donor and recipient cats hastened consideration of what constituted good quality of life or otherwise, how might it be measured and what were the physiological bases of it. The many unanswered questions led to the decision to hold a two-day conference at the Royal Society jointly with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) Ethics Committee and the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW).

A broad representation of 230 scientists, veterinarians, ethicists and others from 22 different countries considered in detail basic aspects of neurophysiology, behaviour and sentience, and focussed thought on what we do to animals in terms of what we believe to be in an animal's best interests as judged previously anthropomorphically when

there was no sound evidence to assess its quality of life. Hitherto we may have judged the quality of life to be acceptable if the animal produced well, in terms of eggs, meat or milk or sports performance, but the conference moved the subject from production considerations to answer much more basic questions, some of which will require detailed examination of neurological and physiological aspects and of sentience, as well as bringing in ethical considerations of the use of animals.

While the question "What is meant by the 'Quality of Life'" may not have been fully answered by this conference, without doubt it has initiated an important and, it is hoped, a continuing search for a better understanding of sentience of animals from the lower to the higher orders of animals as we know them in production and companion animal systems. It is hoped that this analysis of the quality of life in animals will facilitate a more effective understanding of the 'duty of care' by animal keepers as demanded by the new Animal Welfare Act and regulations. Will this greater understanding of 'quality of life' assist in the formulation of improved laws that regulate the treatment and use of animals? An important hope is that this conference and the publication of these proceedings will lead to an increased focus in teaching in veterinary schools of animal welfare, ethics of the use of animals and the quality of life experienced by animals that veterinarians have under their care. Certainly, we have moved away from the Cartesian view of animals as automata but we should not be caught in the trap of explaining animal behaviour and sentience and the consequent 'Quality of Life' solely in anthropomorphic terms, even though this perception is a useful yardstick when scientific evidence is lacking.

This Conference, contributed to by several distinguished scientists, will not answer all of the queries that arise on the 'Quality of Life' but it will contribute significantly to the adage 'the way a nation treats its animals is a mark of its civilisation'.