

Exploring **moral distress** amongst **veterinarians** who **care** for **poor people** and their **pets** in **multi-species communities**



Invited Presenter:

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[@Rock_M](#) on Twitter

Acknowledgements

■ Teamwork:

- This presentation would not have been possible without expertise and insights shared by many people over many years, including colleagues, participants, partnered organizations, postdoctoral scholars, and students.
- Co-Authors: T. Baker DVM, MSc; S. Chalhoub, DVM, DACVIM (SAIM); K. Van Patten, MSW; and C.L. Adams, PhD (Veterinary Epidemiology), MSW
- Assistance from K.M. McLennan in preparing this research presentation and related materials.
- Inspiration from veterinary colleagues with PhDs in social research, notably Drs C. Degeling and A. Gardiner;
- Appreciation for our administrative colleagues, especially P. Cooper.

■ Funders and Sponsors for the Research:

- Calgary Urban Project Society;
- Canadian Institutes of Health Research (M.J.R. as principal investigator + C.D. & C.L.A. as co-investigators);
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- Purina PetCare Canada (C.L.A, S.C.);
- Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council of Canada (M.J.R.);
- University of Calgary (many contributions, including research ethics certifications)

- **Responsibilities for Indigenous Reconciliation:** Our team strives to honour the Calls to Action issued by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The University of Calgary operates on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in southern Alberta. Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 .

Disclosure of Potential for Competing Interests

- None of the funders or sponsors directly influenced the research process or this presentation.
- The clinics that form the basis of this research became possible through a partnership between a charity called the Calgary Urban Project Society ([@CUPSCalgaryAB](#)) and the University of Calgary's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine ([@UCalgaryVetMed](#)).
 - C.L. Adams and S.C. Chalhoub played leadership roles, before, during, and after these clinics.
- M.J. Rock holds an honorary appointments as Adjunct Professor with [@UCalgaryArts](#), [@UCalgary_FSW](#), and ([@UCalgaryVetMed](#)), which currently employs C.L. Adams, T. Baker, and S. Chalhoub, as well as in T. Baker began to assist as a master's student [@UCalgaryVetMed](#).
 - K. Van Patten began to assist as a master's student [@UCalgary_FSW](#).
- Neither M.J. Rock nor any of the co-authors have worked for [@CUPSCalgaryAB](#), whether in paid or unpaid roles
 - Early in the research, [@CUPSCalgaryAB](#) employed a former master's student with M.J. Rock
 - M.J. Rock has had some contact with leaders in [@CUPSCalgaryAB](#) and in other social-service charities, notably while serving as the Associate Scientific Director [@OBrien_IPH](#)
 - For more than a decade, M.J. Rock and team members have maintained contact with providers of human-animal services, especially [@CalgaryHumane](#) and [@CityOfCalgary](#).

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<http://hdl.handle.net/1880/114794>.

Why do we use the term “pets”?

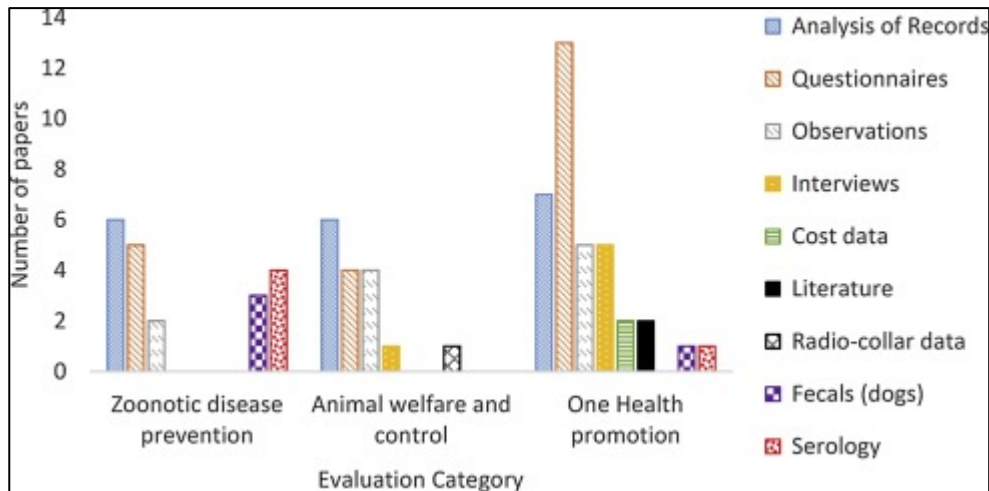
Please, see:

Rock, M. J., & Degeling, C. (2013). Public health ethics and a status for pets as person-things: Revisiting the place of animals in urbanized societies. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, 10(4), 485-495.

Evaluating Subsidized Veterinary Services

Few peer-reviewed evaluations

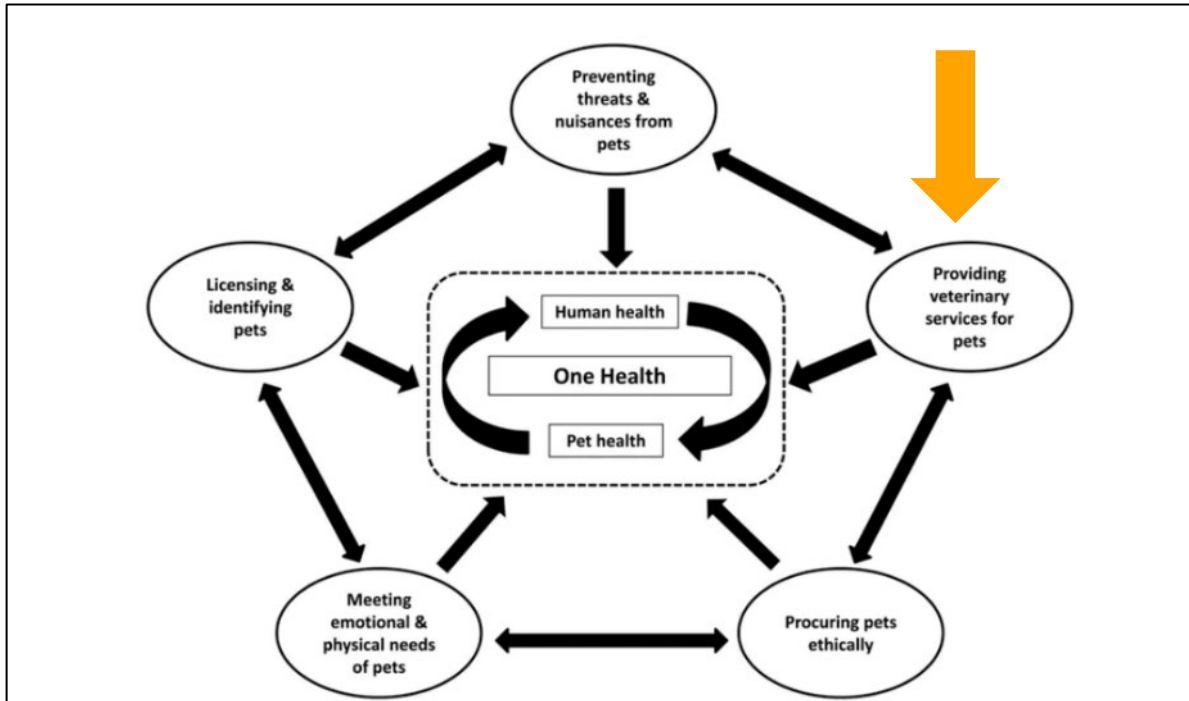
n=32, 2008-2017



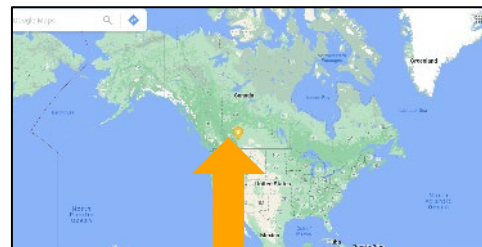
Baker, T., Kutz, S., Toews, L., Edwards, N., & Rock, M. (2018).
Are we adequately evaluating subsidized veterinary services?
A scoping review. *Preventive Veterinary Medicine*, 157, 59-69.

- 3 main types:
 - 1) Zoonotic disease prevention
 - 2) Animal welfare and population control
 - 3) One-Health promotion
 - Some social research
 - None asked veterinary-service providers for their views

Calgary, a 'Model City' for Human-Animal Services



Rock, M. J., Adams, C. L., Degeling, C., Massolo, A., & McCormack, G. R. (2015). Policies on pets for healthy cities: A conceptual framework. *Health Promotion International*, 30(4), 976-986.



Google Maps. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://www.google.ca/maps/@51.0405764,-114.0026858,3z>

- Many regard Calgary as a model city for human-animal services (Rock et al., 2015; Mouton & Rock, 2021; Mouton & Rock, 2022)
- The Calgary model recognizes veterinary services (Rock et al., 2015; Rock et al., 2019)
- Finances pose barriers to veterinary services
 - Calgary Humane Society reserves veterinary services for animals 'in care' (Toohey & Rock, 2019; Rock, Degeling, & Adams, 2020)
 - City of Calgary covers spay/neuter surgeries for some poor people's pets (Rock et al., 2015; Graham et al., 2019)
 - Tails of Help offers CAD\$1K per year per clinic, across Alberta (Rock, Degeling, & Adams, 2020)

Veterinary Education and Subsidized Services



Fig. 1 - Queue at the Royal Veterinary College's Poor People's Outpatient Clinic, Camden Town, London, around 1930 (Simon Jackson, Royal Veterinary College, London).

Gardiner, A. (2009). The animal as surgical patient: A historical perspective in the 20th century. *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 31(3-4), 355-376.

- In "Animals in Surgery — Surgery in Animals: Nature and Culture in Animal-Human Relationship and Modern Surgery," a special issue edited by T. Schlich, E. Mykhalovskiy, M. Rock.

Calgary

Free Calgary vet care program sees big jump in demand



Program for CUP5 clients has space for about 50 appointments. This year they were booked in 24 hours

David Bell - CBC News - Posted: Feb 09, 2017 8:05 PM MT | Last Updated: February 9, 2017



Dr. Serge Chalhouh and his students at the University of Calgary's faculty of veterinary medicine have been offering clinics for the past three years. He says the demand this year has jumped. (Submitted by Serge Chalhouh)

Bell, D. (2017, February 10). Free Calgary vet care program sees big jump in demand. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/u-of-c-vet-care-free-1.3975428>

Service-Learning Opportunity and Social Research



Veterinary students examine a cat at the CUPS pet health clinic. (CBC)

CBC News (2016, March 3). Free clinic a win-win for vet students, low-income pet owners.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/cups-pet-clinic-university-calgary-1.3475112>

- UCalgary's veterinary school partnered with the Calgary Urban Project Society
 - Outreach clinics for poor clients and their pets, e.g., those housed by the charity
 - Outreach clinics integrated into veterinary education, once per year
- Prospective case-study design
- Peer-reviewed publications to date:
 - Open-ended interviews with veterinary educators (Rock, Degeling, & Adams, 2020)
 - Pre/Post questionnaires with veterinary students (Van Patten, Chalhoub, Baker, Rock & Adams, 2021)

Learning by Doing, and through Social Research



The University of Calgary Faculty of Veterinary Medicine (UCVM) partners with the Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) to host free veterinary clinics for pets of people living below the poverty line.

Faculty of Veterinary Medicine | Giving.
University of Calgary. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from
<https://ucalgary.ca/giving/faculties/veterinary-medicine>

- 1) Semi-structured interviews
 - Clients
 - Social-service providers
 - Veterinary-service providers
- 2) Interview Guides → Analytic Matrix
- 3) Thematic Content Analysis
 - Detect and decipher “patterns of shared meaning, cohering around a central concept” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p. 4)
 - **Moral Distress** amongst veterinarians emerged as the central concept

Moral Distress and Meaning in Veterinary Work

Moral Distress arises
when a caring
professional

“knows the right thing to
do, but institutional
constraints make it nearly
impossible to pursue the
right course of action”

Jameton, A. (1984). Nursing
Practice: The Ethical Issues.
Prentice-Hall, p. 6.

Veterinary scholarship has begun to:

- 1) Investigate moral distress;
- 2) Look for ways to improve well-being.

For Example:

- Wallace, J. E. (2019). Meaningful work and well-being: A study of the positive side of veterinary work. *Veterinary Record*, 185(18), 571-571.
- Arbe Montoya, A. I., Hazel, S., Matthew, S. M., & McArthur, M. L. (2019). Moral distress in veterinarians. *Veterinary Record*, 185(20), 631-631.
- Richards, L., Coghlan, S., & Delany, C. (2020). “I Had No Idea That Other People in the World Thought Differently to Me”: Ethical Challenges in Small Animal Veterinary Practice and Implications for Ethics Support and Education. *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*, 47(6), 728-736.

Analytic Matrix → Views varied by group:

- 1. Clients;**
- 2. Social-service providers;**
- 3. Veterinary-service providers.**

Thematic Analysis:

- How different were these interviews?**
- Why did the social-service providers sound so different from the veterinary-service providers?**

Clients reported, Pets are family members.

“I have a 9 years old boy” who is
**“the only child we have, so we decided
to get a pet for him and for ourselves.”**

“Since [their dog] came to our house, he
brought lots of **joy** and **happiness...**”



Photo credit: Melanie Rock

“He **means the world to me.** He is
currently acting as an emotional support
animal just because I have **3 little girls**
and they’re currently **in foster care** and
they’re not coming home.”

“So he’s ... my one baby. **I can have
baby.**”



Photo credit: Pearl Cooper

The **veterinary-service providers** are **true partners**, agreed the **social-service providers**.

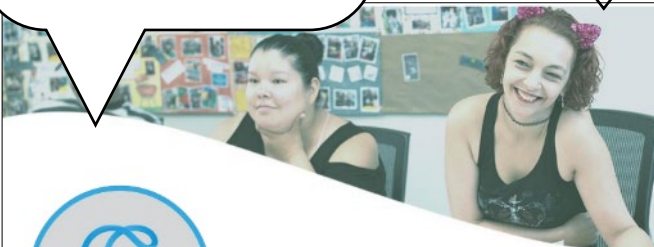
“You guys
set up, took
down, did
everything.
...the overall
support
[for] our
clients was
amazing.”

“It’s not like a
regular check-
up...the students
are very
thorough [then
there’s] the
education
piece.”

There’s
“...not as
much
concern with
the larger
community...
[with]
animals not
having
shots...”

Clients “are
teaching
their friends
or other
people in the
building
[who] didn’t
get a chance
to go.”

“There’s not a lot
in Calgary. Yep.”



@CUPSCalgaryAB
Retrieved June 30, 2022, from
<https://twitter.com/CUPSCalgaryAB>

Feeling **angst** and **sorrow**, disclosed the **veterinary-service providers**.

“I worry that the guilt that the owners feel and because now they know what’s going on, they know what should be done about it, and they still can’t do it”

“It’s a **balancing act**, trying to balance the **owners’ mental health** and **well-being**, against the **well-being** of the **animal**”

“We were afraid that, if he finally let us work on the dog and something happened – ‘Oh my God, what’s going to happen’?”



Veterinarians' interviews all showed Moral Distress.

- Transcripts displayed **Angst**, but flattened the depth of **Sorrow**.
- Impoverishment and Marginalization leach meaning
 - Clinical practice, Education, + Community Service
- Veterinarians often cannot practice commensurate with their capabilities and obligations
 - Not in for-profit clinics with clients and pets in dire straits.
 - Not in “free clinics,” even with a veterinary school’s backing.

Might this study add depth to what we previously reported for views held by veterinary students?

- **Veterinary students valued** what they learned about human-animal bonds and poverty, and the opportunity to integrate skillsets
 - A veterinary educator invited 4th-year students to take part in a group interview (Rock, Degeling, & Adams, 2020).
 - Pre/post questionnaires with 3rd-year students (Van Patten, Chalhoub, Baker, Rock, & Adams, 2021).
- In post-outreach questionnaires, this cohort did not report any increase in motivation for community service, after qualifying as veterinarians (Van Patten, Chalhoub, Baker, Rock, & Adams, 2021).
- **Moral Distress** may account, in part, for why so many veterinary students did not feel any more enthusiastic and prepared to care for poor people and their pets
 - We can only speculate now, and hope to learn more

Veterinary Expertise Disrupts Human/Animal Dualism



- Veterinary professionals have legal and moral obligations towards human and non-human beings
- Public Health is key, increasingly viewed as One Health
 - The Canadian Veterinary Oath (2018) pledges protection of human and non-human beings, in shared environments, “for the benefit of society”
- Veterinary Expertise isn’t confined to veterinarians
 - “The Canadian Veterinary Oath” (2018) can now accommodate allied professionals and interdisciplinary teams, through careful wording
 - “The Veterinarians’ Oath” was the original title chosen by Canadian Veterinary Medicine Association (2004)
 - Even so, the Canadian Veterinary Medicine Association’s website illustrates “The Canadian Veterinary Oath” (2018) with a barnyard photo of a veterinarian (apparently cis-male, and white)

Medico-Legal Borderlands and Veterinary Expertise

“The **medico-legal borderland** has clinics, prisons, medical boards, courts, occupational and public health offices, regulatory government agencies, crisis intervention centres and street policing.”

(Timmermans & Gabe, 2002)

- Are we the first team to extend the concept of **Medico-Legal Borderland/s** towards **Human-Animal Services**? We think so (Rault, Adams, Springett, & Rock, 2022).
- In exploring Veterinary Educators’ **Moral Distress**, this presentation began to plumb **Medical-Legal Borderlands** that Social Researchers haven’t investigated.
 - “Legal” is broader than Criminology
 - Veterinary Medicine qualifies as “Medicine”
 - Veterinary Expertise is interdisciplinary, and already includes social research/ers

Prospects will hinge on **Advocacy** and **Coalitions**

“The most problematic organisation by far was the **People's Dispensary for Sick Animals of the Poor...**

For the **veterinary profession**, the **threat** was personified in the Dispensary's founder, **Maria Dickin**. She undertook **social work** in the East End where she was appalled by the poverty and human and animal suffering... She was in her forties when she founded the [Dispensary].”

- ☐ Re/forming **multi-species families**
- ☐ Stabilizing multi-species communities ?
- ☐ Strengthening **multi-species publics** ?
 - Recruiting, then retaining veterinary-service providers who coordinate effectively with advocates, social-service providers, and social researchers
 - Programming innovations, with robust evaluations
 - Experimenting with policy revisions and reforms

Thank YOU for your attention.

For more information, and to connect....

- Website for the Team: [Human-Animal Studies and One-Health Promotion](#)
- Email: mrock@ucalgary.ca
- Twitter: [@Rock M](#)
- Curriculum Vitae via [ORCID](#)
- Résumé via [LinkedIn](#)
- Publication Lists and Links via [Google-Scholar](#), [ORCID](#), + [Scopus](#)