The dilemma in the April issue dealt with a valuable Suffolk tup, which was jointly owned by three farmers. Having already served the first two flocks, the tup appeared a bit off colour when it came to the last farm. The provisional diagnosis was acute bronchopneumonia with fever, for which the vet advised rest, antibiotics, anti-inflammatories, as well as good hay and plenty of water. However, because his ewes had been synchronised, the farmer agreed to follow all the advice except resting the tup (IP, April 2015, vol 37, pp 206-207). Gwen Rees empathised with the farmer’s difficult predicament but suggested that the best option for the ram (as well as the ewes and the farm) was to find a different tup for the season. Although this would mean either using a substandard ram or paying a high price at such short notice, the two other owners might help with the cost or search. She added that if veterinary advice had been ignored an insurance company might not pay out in the event of the ram’s death or infertility. It might also be necessary to remind the farmer of the Animal Welfare Act and perhaps even report the farmer for neglect if the ram died.

Comments on the dilemma in the April issue: ‘The mating game’

It’s always difficult to know how to proceed when you’ve given advice that you don’t think will be acted upon, leaving you worried that a patient will suffer. Remembering that once you’ve divested your professional duties the ultimate responsibility for the welfare of the animal in this type of situation lies with the owner may help to put things into perspective.

However, almost three in four respondents to our online poll agreed that a vet should exert further pressure to prevent poor welfare. This implies that it may be worth risking the negative consequences of the farmer feeling betrayed. The option of somehow letting the farmer’s plans be known to the co-owners, could be seen as a softer option. Maybe the farmer would not find out that the vet prompted a call from a co-owner and peer pressure could be effective in encouraging a change of mind, especially if the co-owner offered to help find a different solution. But, what should happen if your client were to find out? The actions would appear to break our general codes of truthfulness and confidentiality. One could ask whether a ‘virtuous’ vet would engage in this type of behaviour. Perhaps this is a case in which respondents were prepared to let the end justify the means.

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Have you faced a dilemma that you would like considered in a future instalment of Everyday Ethics? If so, e-mail a brief outline to inpractice@bva-edit.co.uk.

Everyday Ethics poll

Last month’s poll asked:
You think a shared ram is too sick for the last farmer to put it in with his ewes. The farmer says he will disregard your advice and work the ram. What should you do?

Of those responding:
43 per cent per cent voted to report the farmer to the relevant authority to prevent any suffering from occurring.
26 per cent voted to do nothing further; you have done what you can by giving your advice.
21 per cent voted to somehow let the farmer’s plans be known to the other owners in the hope that they will exert pressure to dissuade the farmer.
10 per cent voted to wait to see if the ram suffers or even dies, and report the farmer at this stage.

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