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Forestburg vet barred from practice after multiple sanctions

Accused of practising without registration

By Sam Konnert

BLACK PRESS NEWS MEDIA

An Alberta veterinarian described by the profession's regulatory body as "ungovernable" has been ordered to stop practicing for at least three years, as well as pay \$7,000, after repeatedly ignoring court orders stemming from complaints levelled against him.

The Alberta Medical Veterinary Association filed the injunction in the Alberta Court of Queen's Bench in May, against Jeff Serfas, to force him to comply with a long list of prior disciplinary rules. An Alberta judge made their ruling on July 29 in Edmonton.

Serfas was a registered veterinarian with the association since 1997 until he was stripped of his registration in October 2020.

He operated the Forestburg Medical Clinic, located about 64 kilometres east of Bashaw, and has been dubbed the association's "most prolific offender" by its attorney.

Court documents obtained by Black Press Media show how the association hired a private investigator to confirm that Serfas was continuing to practice.

In the private investigator's affidavit, he says he believes that Serfas was paid cash to perform check-ups and procedures on feral cats, suggested that Serfas performed an oral operation on a dog and had done dental work on a local pony. Serfas denies these claims.

Operating under an alias, the investigator purchased antibiotic medications from Serfas, to which Serfas did not deny.

"I have a very hard time declining to assist my friends when they are in need, especially after so many years of dedicated service to the Forestburg community," Serfas said in his affidavit. **Complaints, allegations levelled since 2014**

This isn't the first time Serfas has been in trouble with the association.

The first of a laundry list of official complaints made against Serfas began in 2014, for alleged inappropriate behaviour and treatment



Serfas was a registered veterinarian with the Alberta Medical Veterinary Association since 1997. He operated the Forestburg Medical Clinic about 150 kilometres east of Red Deer. (Facebook photo)

of a feral cat. According to that ruling's statement of facts, Serfas made physical threats and used abusive language towards his staff and clients.

"As a result of his emotional volatility, Dr. Serfas has on occasion intentionally harmed his own animals," the complaint reads.

He was ordered to pay \$16,000 in fines, attend six months of anger management courses and received a 30-day suspension.

Other veterinarians disapproved of the light punishment. In an open letter, three Calgary

veterinarians accused the association of being too light-handed.

"Nothing less than stripping him of his privilege to practice for life should be in order," the letter reads.

Serfas was again suspended for 30 days in 2016 for allegedly dispensing the antibiotic amoxicillin to his infant son in an unsafe manner. He was fined \$14,000 and ordered to attend more training.

In 2019, Serfas was charged \$50,000, had his registration suspended for a year and his clinic

was closed after a tribunal found that he had acted unprofessionally in a further 18 instances between April to August 2017.

These instances involved two botched surgeries on separate dogs that went into Serfas' care and died shortly after.

Despite the forced closure, a 2020 tribunal found that Serfas continued to do pregnancy checks on cattle, semen test bulls, order and administer pharmaceuticals like euthanyl and ketamine, euthanize animals and receive payments for veterinary services.

He was fined up to \$100,000 and lost his registration with the association. He was also ordered to close the Forestburg Veterinary Clinic.

At the time, the tribunal agreed with the association's attorney, who said that the "extreme seriousness of the unprofessional conduct and the clear, consistent and lengthy pattern of conduct by Dr. Serfas demonstrating his ungovernability and lack of respect for his regulatory body." Losing veterinarians in rural areas leaves significant gap

Black Press Media was unable to reach the association by press deadline for further comment on the latest ruling. A lawyer representing the association said in an email that subsequent breaches of the court order could bring contempt consequences.

Cases like this are extremely rare, according to animal welfare lawyer Jennifer Friedman.

"Individuals who are a member of a regulated industry are told very clearly that there's a requirement to adhere to all of the stringent regulations, and failure to do so has significant repercussions," she said. "Because we're dealing with someone's livelihood, the likelihood of ignoring those disciplinary orders is extremely low."

The loss of a veterinarian in a rural community is significant for its residents, she said, adding that it could potentially leave a large gap for residents with animals.

"The paramount duty is that if you are suspended, you don't carry out practice without a license in good standing, even if you're trying to help your friend or your neighbour."

Serfas nor his legal team were available for comment.



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