

PRESS RELEASE

2 February 2007

VETERINARY SURGEON TO BE STRUCK OFF FOR DRUG THEFT

The Disciplinary Committee of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons yesterday [1 February 2007] directed that a recently-qualified veterinary surgeon should be struck off the *Register of Veterinary Surgeons* having found him guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

At a one-day hearing, Mr Michael McCarthy MRCVS, a 2005 graduate from Liverpool University, was found guilty on four charges of professional misconduct after admitting to stealing controlled drugs from four previous employers.

The Committee heard how Mr McCarthy, who holds dual Irish/American citizenship, had carried out the offences while working as a locum veterinary surgeon in various practices around the UK.

The Committee heard how Mr R Newcombe MRCVS, of the Plymouth-based PDSA, had suspected Mr McCarthy of taking controlled drugs from the surgery for his own use and had dispensed with his services as a locum immediately. He later advised Mr McCarthy to seek help from the Veterinary Surgeons Health Support Scheme.

Mr E A Nelson MRCVS and Police Sergeant Hall gave evidence regarding Mr McCarthy's theft from the Hadrian Veterinary Group in Hexham, Northumberland.

Mr McCarthy, who represented himself, admitted the facts of the charges and agreed that in relation to each charge he was guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect. In addressing the Committee, he apologised for his conduct, saying he felt shame and embarrassment. He stated that he would never have foreseen that he could find himself in such a position and apologised to the witnesses, thanking them for their support. He did not offer any defence.

In mitigation, Mr McCarthy outlined the personal circumstances that surrounded the tragic events of his father's death and other family circumstances that he believed had triggered his problems. He believed that the symptoms associated with his depression could indicate Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He stated that he wished to make a clean break and return to family in New York, where he would carry on with his drug dependency treatment programme while working in a non-veterinary capacity.

The Committee was impressed by Mr McCarthy's full and frank admissions, his open acknowledgment of his problems and his wish to overcome them. However, the Committee believed that Mr McCarthy had abused his position as a veterinary surgeon in order to obtain drugs for his own use, in addition to breaching the trust of an employer through theft. Any misuse of veterinary drugs is a serious offence, in particular as Mr McCarthy, in a position of trust, was supplied with the keys to Dangerous Drug cabinets by virtue of his employment.

According to Mr Brian Jennings, Chairman of the Disciplinary Committee, "The Committee accepted Mr McCarthy's version of events and considered that he would benefit from a period of time away from access to restricted drugs in order to restructure his life.

“This Committee cannot bind any future Committee, but in any application to the College for restoration, Mr McCarthy would be wise to demonstrate that he no longer suffered from a dependency problem, supported by medical evidence proving long-term abstinence. He would be expected to show that he had continued in his counselling support. In order to demonstrate his maintenance of his clinical knowledge he should provide proof of Continuing Professional Development (CPD).”

The Committee directed the Registrar to remove Mr McCarthy’s name from the *Register*.

ENDS

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The RCVS is the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons in the UK and deals with issues of professional misconduct, maintaining the register of veterinary surgeons eligible to practise in the UK and assuring standards of veterinary education.
2. RCVS disciplinary powers are exercised through the Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees, established in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (the 1966 Act). The RCVS has authority to deal with three types of case:
 - a) Fraudulent registration
 - b) Criminal convictions
 - c) Allegations of disgraceful professional conduct
3. The Disciplinary Committee is a constituted judicial tribunal under the 1966 Act and follows rules of evidence similar to those used in a court of law.
4. A respondent veterinary surgeon may appeal a Disciplinary Committee decision to the Privy Council within 28 days of the date of the decision. If no appeal is received, the Committee’s judgment takes effect after this period.
5. Further information, including the charges against Mr McCarthy and the Disciplinary Committee’s findings and judgment can be found via www.rcvs.org.uk/disciplinary.