

The 176th Annual General Meeting of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, held on Friday 12 July 2019 at 10am in the Lecture Theatre of the Royal Institute of British Architects

The President, Amanda Boag, chaired the meeting and welcomed members of RCVS Council and Veterinary Nurses Council, in addition to other members of the profession and their guests who were in attendance.

The Registrar, Eleanor Ferguson, reported that the notice of the meeting had been published in the 1 June 2019 edition of the *Veterinary Record*. The President also read a statement from Her Majesty the Queen as Patron of the RCVS.

1. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting, held on Friday 13 July 2018, which had also been made available online, were confirmed and approved as a correct record.

2. Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2018

The President formally presented the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts for the year ending 31 December 2018.

3. Questions

Before moving to questions regarding the Annual Report from those attending the AGM, the President said that the College first wished to handle a number of questions that had been submitted *in absentia* from MsRCVS by email the day before the AGM took place. The President stated that there was no precedent for dealing with so many questions so close to the AGM and that she did not wish to establish one. However, she stated that she and the Registrar were happy to deal with these questions as they related to some concern and confusion about RCVS Council's decision to carry out a review of telemedicine and under care, telemedicine being a topic referred to in the Annual Report. Following the proceedings, the College would publish the letters in full, along with its responses to each, and make them publicly available online (see Annex A).

The Registrar then proceeded to read out a summarised version of the five questions that had been received the previous day, with the President then reading the College's response to each. These were as follows:

Alison Lambert MRCVS

Can the RCVS share the rationale behind its support for the introduction of Remote Prescribing and the inevitable consequence of less restriction on antibiotic usage?

The President responded: “We have not expressed support for remote prescribing. Rather, Standards Committee has been examining the implication of the growth of telehealth and the potential benefits and risks (including the impact on [antimicrobial resistance] AMR). It was for this reason a trial of remote prescribing was proposed to gather evidence. This proposed trial has been superseded by the decision of Council to conduct a wider review of ‘under care’.

Samuel Dane Walker MRCVS

Has the decision to provide privileged access to the RCVS by some organisations who would benefit from telemedicine rendered the RCVS at risk of being sued by other companies who have not had the same access?

The President responded: “No organisation or individual has been provided with privileged access. The opportunity is there for any and all to speak with us to express their views or obtain information in relation to current guidance.”

Peter MacKellar MRCVS

Will Council now publish a summary of its recent discussions in relation to telemedicine and confirm if any abstained from the “unanimous” vote?

Given that the membership has provided the funding for the legal advice on which the instigation of this review is predicated, should this legal advice not, now, be shared with the wider membership?

The President responded: “The legal advice quite properly requested by Council is privileged and will not be shared with the wider profession. This is analogous to a Board of Directors receiving legal advice which would not then be shared with the wider organisation or with every shareholder. As the discussions pertained directly to such advice, no further summary of proceedings will be published. We can confirm the decision was unanimous, with no abstentions.”

Iain Richards MRCVS

Given the RCVS’s poor use of, or selective presentation of evidence, what assurances can be given that the announced review of “under my care” will adhere to the principles of “Evidence Based” enquiry that the college is keen to promote for its members?

The President responded: “We refute the claim that there was ‘poor use of, or selective presentation of evidence’ in relation to the telemedicine consultation.

“Going forward, there will be wide-ranging engagement with the professions, and to ensure that there is no bias, real or perceived, we will ask stakeholders for their input on the design of any consultation on proposals, that results from the review.”

Sinead Armstrong MRCVS

What assurances can the College give that the review of 'Under care' will be carried out by those who actually do provide care? In addition can the RCVS give assurances that 'Standards Committee' will always contain a number of genuine practitioners without vested interests?

The President responded: "The review of under care will be an open and inclusive process in which we will seek to engage across the veterinary professions. Any proposals that emerge from this review will be subject to a full consultation with the profession and public.

"The veterinary profession has the privilege of self-regulation. By its nature, this means that all involved will have 'interests'. As with all aspects of their professional lives, the veterinary surgeons and nurses involved in decision-making at the College are expected to maintain the highest level of integrity and to make the health and welfare of animals paramount."

After these responses had been read out the President then invited questions from those attending the AGM in person.

The first questioner was **Duncan MacIntyre MRCVS** who asked Council to provide reassurances regarding the protection of farm animals in rural and other isolated communities if veterinary practices went out of business due to the RCVS allowing telemedicine.

In response, the President reassured Mr MacIntyre that the College would take into account those issues and the views of stakeholders, including practices of this nature, when undertaking the wider review of 'under care' that Council had announced.

The second questioner was **Dr Richard Charles Woodhouse Weston MRCVS** who asked the RCVS to share the legal advice it had received regarding its review of 'under our care' stating that, though it is protected by client-lawyer privilege, in his view the members were the clients, as they had paid for it, and should therefore have access to it.

The Registrar answered that this is a misunderstanding of who is the client in regards to the legal advice requested by Council. It was stated that, as the authorised legal officer, the Registrar was the 'client' and, as such, passed the advice to RCVS Council. She indicated this was analogous to a Board of Directors receiving legal advice which would not then be shared with the wider organisation or with every shareholder.

Following this response **Dr Weston** then went on to ask a supplementary question as to whether the College had explored the possibility of getting a second opinion on the legal advice.

The Registrar stated that Council did consider getting a second opinion and chose not to pursue this option.

In his supplementary question, Mr Weston also made reference to what he perceived were mistakes made by the College in the handling of the Chikosi disciplinary case.

The third questioner was **Robert Duncan Partridge MRCVS**. Querying the competence of Council and the attitude of the organisation, Mr Partridge:

- a. Indicated that two lay members of Council had yet to provide biographies and/or photographs and on the basis of such 'lack of interest' queried if they should resign. He also queried the Declarations of Interest of the CEO that stated that information was available upon request, which he considered unacceptable and that he had been told information would be dealt with as per a request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); and
- b. Said he therefore could not provide assurances to the AGM that the CEO's husband was not involved with a Council member in a telemedicine company.

It was stated in reply:

- a. In relation to Declarations of Interest re: lay members – this was noted [following the meeting the RCVS website was updated to include declarations and photographs of both lay members referred to]. Re: CEO declaration – this was answered by the CEO confidentially.
- b. The CEO confirmed that her husband was a television editor and had absolutely nothing to do with telemedicine or the veterinary sector.

4. Council elections: new members and retirements

The Registrar then turned to the results of the 2019 RCVS Council election.

The Registrar read the report of Electoral Reform Services relating to the election of RCVS Council members, as follows:

Order	Nominee	Votes
1	Niall Connell	3,766
2	Linda Belton	3,581
3	Jo Dyer	3,146

The Registrar declared that those named were elected Members of Council for a period of four years. The Registrar then invited Linda Belton, a newly-elected member, on to stage to be formally welcomed on to RCVS Council by the President.

Turning to university-appointed Council members, the Registrar confirmed that the University of Bristol had nominated Richard Hammond to replace Andrea Jeffrey as the university's appointee and that the Royal Veterinary College had nominated Professor Ken Smith to replace Professor Stuart Reid. Richard Hammond was then formally welcomed back to Council by the President. Professor Smith was not able to attend the occasion.

The President then went on to bid farewell to the following retiring Council members: Professor Tim Greet (four years' service), Dr Kate Richards (four years' service), Peter Robinson (four years' service), Andrea Jeffrey (nine years' service), Professor Stuart Reid (14 years' service) and Lynne Hill (20 years' service).

VN Council

The Registrar reported that, due to the fact that there were only two candidates for the two available elected places on VN Council, there was no election to VN Council this year.

The two who stood were Liz Cox, currently a member of VN Council, and Jane Davidson, a new member. Jane was invited on to the stage where she was formally welcomed on to VN Council by Racheal Marshall, Chair of VN Council.

The Registrar then thanked the retiring VN Council member Lucy Bellwood for her contribution.

5. Date of next AGM

The next AGM was provisionally agreed to take place on Friday, 10 July 2020, at One Great George Street.

6. Meeting of the RCVS Council to elect President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer

Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from:

- Dr Caroline Allen
- Professor David Argyle
- Professor Ewan Cameron
- Lynne Hill
- Professor Ken Smith
- Dr Chris Tufnell
- Professor James Wood

Declarations of interests

Professor May declared that he had been appointed to the Home Office, Animals in Science Committee.

Matters for Decision by Council**Approval of the Presidential Team and Treasurer for 2019/20**

The Registrar asked Council to approve the appointment of the new Presidential Team and Treasurer for 2019/2020 as follows:

President:	Dr Niall Connell
(Senior) Vice-President:	Amanda Boag
(Junior) Vice-President:	Dr Mandisa Greene
Treasurer:	Dr Christopher (Kit) Sturgess

The Presidential Team and Treasurer appointments were approved.

Correspondence and matters for note

The President said that the College had been alerted to a petition started by the British Veterinary Union (part of Unite the Union) which states: 'We urge the RCVS not to authorise prescription of POM-V remotely without physical examination of the patient/ herd.' As of the previous evening, the petition had been signed by 1,219 individuals.

The President then invited Dr Shams Mir and Dr Suzanna Hudson-Cooke from the British Veterinary Union on to the stage to hand over the petition.

Date of next meeting

The date of the next Council meeting was confirmed as:

Thursday, 5 September 2019 at 10am.



The RCVS
Belgravia House,
62-64 Horseferry Rd,
London
SW1P 2AF

11th July 2019

Dear Amanda / Eleanor

I am really disappointed not to be able to attend the RCVS Day as I feel very strongly about the issue of remote prescribing and I know that RCVS day is an opportunity for MsRCVS to ask questions.

I would like to put the following as a written question to the meeting. This follows regular previous precedent where written questions have been read out to the meeting when a member is not able to attend.

Please can you confirm that my question will be read out at the open meeting of the RCVS AGM?

The RCVS purports to support the responsible use of medicines and in particular the responsible use of antimicrobials, with the aim of minimising antibiotic resistance (particularly in livestock affecting the human food chain).

From my wide experience of the profession around the world, I am certain that the use of Remote Prescribing, where vets would be allowed to prescribe antibiotics to farm animals, without an established Vet Client Patient Relationship is incompatible with the responsible use of antibiotics. Can the RCVS share the rationale behind its support for the introduction of Remote Prescribing (which led to its previous proposal for a trial) and the inevitable consequence of less restriction on antibiotic usage?

I look forward to reading the response of the AGM to this question as to how both animal and human welfare might be protected by the RCVS

Many thanks

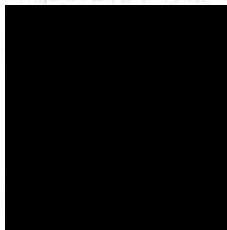
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alison". The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Alison Lambert
BVSc CMRS MRCVS

Alison Lambert BVSc CMRS MRCVS



Mrs A M Lambert BVSc CMRS MRCVS



Ref ECF/dw
Tel 020 7202 0718
E-mail e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk
Website www.rcvs.org.uk

23 July 2019

Dear Mrs Lambert,

With reference to your letter of 11 July 2019 re: the RCVS Annual General Meeting (AGM), I confirm that we addressed a series of questions that we received via email the day before the AGM.

Contrary to what you state, there is no set precedent in relation to such questions/multiple communiques so close to the AGM. However, on this occasion, we were happy to deal with questions, as it was felt they revealed some concern and confusion about Council's position in relation to telemedicine and remote prescribing. By doing so, however, and accepting questions as we did, this does not establish a precedent going forward.

A summary of the questions submitted (of which yours was one), together with our response was read out to the meeting.

As was indicated at the meeting, we will publish your letter/responses given and make them available via the AGM minutes on-line.

Your question as read to the meeting was as follows:

"Can the RCVS share the rationale behind its support for the introduction of remote prescribing and the inevitable consequence of less restriction on antibiotic use?"

RCVS response was as follows:

"We have not expressed support for remote prescribing. Rather, Standards Committee has been examining the implication of the growth of telehealth and the potential benefits and risks (including the impact on AMR). It was for this reason a trial of remote prescribing was proposed to gather evidence. This proposed trial has been superseded by the decision of Council to conduct a wider review of 'under care'."

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "E. Ferguson".

Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

Eleanor Ferguson

From: Corrie McCann
Sent: 11 July 2019 14:35
To: Amanda Boag; 'Niall Connell'; Lizzie Lockett; Eleanor Ferguson
Subject: FW: Question for AGM

Corrie McCann
Operations Director / Deputy Registrar
Operations Department
Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons
Belgravia House 62-64 Horseferry Road London SW1P 2AF

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-----Original Message-----

From: Dane Walker [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 July 2019 14:19
To: webmaster <webmaster@rcvs.org.uk>
Subject: Question for AGM

To Whom it may concern,

I am unable to attend the AGM as I am out of the country but have been informed that a question can be asked on my behalf. Please see the question below. If for any reason you are unable to ask my question then let me know so that I can arrange for the question to be put forward by another MRCVS

I am an MRCVS with past experience of acting as an unpaid consultant for a company considering telemedicine in the Vet Sector.

As such I have an insight into this field. The most likely beneficiaries of the introduction of remote prescribing are the large veterinary corporate bodies, it being likely that the use of online consultations will actually reduce the local access to a physical veterinary provider. The use of confidential meetings (both sub committees and council itself) to discuss these issues, where a significant proportion of the participants have conflicts of interest raises serious concerns – even if only of perception. Indeed the reason stated for some of the confidentiality of the subcommittees was of “commercial sensitivity” of the information.

Has the decision to provide privileged access to the RCVS by some organisations who would benefit from telemedicine rendered the RCVS at risk of being sued by other companies who have not had the same access?

Best regards

Samuel Dane Walker MRCVS
Director
DNA Vetcare Ltd
www.londonvets.co.uk

BY EMAIL TO:

Mr S D F Walker MA VetMB MRCVS



Ref ECF/dw
Tel 020 7202 0718
E-mail e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk
Website www.rcvs.org.uk

24 July 2019

Dear Mr Walker,

With reference to your email of 11 July 2019 re: the RCVS Annual General Meeting (AGM), I confirm that we addressed a series of questions that we received via email the day before the AGM, of which your email was one.

We did so on this occasion, as it was felt they revealed some concern and confusion about Council's position in relation to telemedicine and remote prescribing. However, by accepting questions so close to the meeting does not establish a precedent going forward.

As was said at the meeting, we will publish your email and our response and make these available on-line via the AGM minutes.

Your question as read to the meeting was as follows:

"Has the decision to provide privileged access to the RCVS by some organisations who would benefit from telemedicine rendered the RCVS at risk of being sued by other companies who have not had the same access?"

Our response was as follows:

"No organisation or individual has been provided with privileged access. The opportunity is there for any and all to speak with us to express their views or obtain information in relation to current guidance."

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "E. Ferguson".

Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor



Drake Vets Ltd

Hinnies, Leg O Mutton Corner, Yelverton, Devon, PL20 6DJ

Tel.: 01822 854255

Fax.: 01822 854255

email: info@DrakeVets.co.uk

web: www.DrakeVets.co.uk

also at

11c Plymouth Road Industrial Estate, Tavistock, PL19 9QN

R.C.V.S.
Belgravia House
62-64 Horseferry Road
LONDON
SW1P 2AF

FAO Ms Amanda Boag, Dr Niall Connell and Eleanor Ferguson

I apologise for not being able to attend in person, but request that the following question is read out at the Annual General Meeting on July 12th 2019: -

"At BSAVA Congress 2019 the Chair of the Standards Committee stated that the debate around the subject of tele-medicine, including tele-prescribing, would be an open debate.

The report of the recent discussion, held in committee, by RCVS Council belies this reassurance, and runs counter to the majority of the 7 "Principles" contained in the "RCVS Code of Conduct for Council".

Will Council now publish, as a minimum, a summary of those discussions and confirm if any abstained from the "unanimous" vote? This would allow the membership to approach the ensuing review of "under his care" with greater confidence and understanding.

Given that the membership has provided the funding for the legal advice on which the instigation of this review is predicated, should this legal advice not, now, be shared with the wider membership?"

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

Peter MacKellar
RCVS No 1314661

Mr P D C MacKellar BA VetMB MRCVS
Drake Vets Ltd
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Website www.rcvs.org.uk

24 July 2019

Dear Mr MacKellar,

With reference to your letter sent on 11 July 2019 re: the RCVS Annual General Meeting (AGM), I confirm that at the AGM we addressed a series of questions we received via email the day before, of which your letter was one.

We did so on this occasion, as it was felt that they revealed some concern and confusion about Council's position in relation to telemedicine and remote prescribing. However, by accepting questions so close to the meeting does not establish a precedent going forward.

As was said at the meeting, we will publish your letter and our response and make these available on-line via the AGM minutes.

Your questions as summarised for the meeting were as follows:

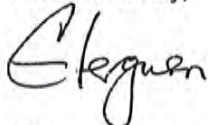
"Will Council now publish, a summary of its recent discussions in relation to telemedicine and confirm if any abstained from the 'unanimous' vote?"

"Given that the membership has provided the funding for the legal advice on which the instigation of this review is predicated, should this legal advice not, now, be shared with the wider membership?"

Our response was as follows:

"The legal advice quite properly requested by Council is privileged and will not be shared with the wider profession. This is analogous to a Board of Directors receiving legal advice which would not then be shared with the wider organisation or with every shareholder. As the discussions pertained directly to such advice, no further summary of preceding will be published. We can confirm the decision was unanimous, with no abstentions."

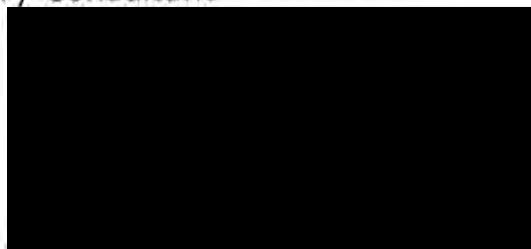
Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

Iain Richards BVSc CertVA CertSHP MVetSci MRCVS

Independent Veterinary Consultant



Eleanor Ferguson,
Registrar, RCVS
Belgravia House
Horseferry Road
London

11th July 2019

Question for RCVS Day

At the RCVS Council meeting last November, the paper on telemedicine suggested that telemedicine had the potential to "access clients that are currently not seeking veterinary...care for their animals." This statement was based upon USA data suggesting that 40% of pet owners were unable to access a vet. The UK data (PDSA PAWS report) showing that only around 10% of animal owners are unregistered with a vet has not been used in any of the college's deliberations.

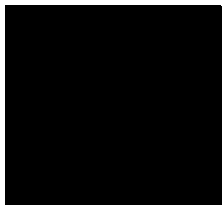
In addition, the survey of telemedicine has been summarised by the RCVS as showing that profession is, "significantly confused," in its understanding and attitude towards remote prescribing. However, a more complete examination of the data shows that, far from being confused, over 80% of respondents regarded remote diagnosis or prescribing as being "high risk" or "inappropriate".

Given the RCVS's poor use of, or selective presentation of evidence, what assurances can be given that the announced review of "under my care" will adhere to the principles of "Evidence Based" enquiry that the college is keen to promote for its members?

Yours Sincerely,

Iain

Dr I M Richards BVSc CertVA CertSHP MVetSci MRCVS



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23 July 2019

Dear Dr Richards,

Thank you for your email of 16 July 2019.

I confirm that at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) we addressed a series of questions that we received by email the day before (of which your letter was one).

You are correct that your question was summarised, though as indicated at the time (and by my email on Friday), we will publish your letter in full as well as our response and will make these available via the AGM minutes on-line.

Your question as read out at the meeting was as follows:

"Given the RCVS's poor use of, or selective presentation of, evidence, what assurances can be given that the announced review of 'under my care' will adhere to the principles of 'evidence based' enquiry that the College is keen to promote for its members?"

Our response was as follows:

"We refute the claim that there was 'poor use of, or selective presentation of, evidence' in relation to the telemedicine consultation.

Going forward, there will be wide-ranging engagement with the professions, and to ensure that there is no bias, real or perceived, we will ask stakeholders for their input on the design of any consultation on proposals, that results from the review."

By way of further response, we have never said '40% of pet owners were unable to access a vet'. What we actually said was:

"In the United States, for example, the North American Veterinary Community (NAVC) estimates that between 40-50% of animal owners do not seek regular veterinary care for their animals."

The PAWS report refers to the percentage of the UK dog, cat, and rabbit populations that are 'not registered with a vet' – the figures are 10% for dogs (not animal owners as stated in the letter), 19% for cats, and 34% for rabbits. To only refer to the figure for dogs and extrapolate to all animal owners would be incorrect.

In addition, the figures refer to very different concepts and are not comparable: the PAWS report refers the percentage of the relevant species that are not registered with a vet. The NAVC figures refer to animal owners (of all types of pet) who are low-end users i.e. those who sometimes go, but not regularly/frequently use a vet. The point being explored was whether telemedicine might encourage these low-end users to access veterinary expertise more rather than going to other sources of advice. Clearly, these users see the need for a vet, but for regular use the vet is not meeting their needs for whatever reasons.

We are not aware of any similar data from the UK, to that supplied via the NAVC report but, in any event, the PAWS report does suggest the prevalence of low-end users is significantly higher than non-users e.g. in 2018 25% hadn't vaccinated their dog (35% cats, 49% rabbits), 21% not treated their dog for fleas (19% cats), 16% not wormed their dog (23% cats) etc.

The confusion we refer to was in relation to the understanding of the current guidelines, not in relation to 'attitudes towards remote prescribing'. What we said was:

"the consultation exercise had indicated significant confusion and that current Guidance was not well understood and was being misinterpreted. It was agreed therefore the RCVS would need to provide clarification as to what was permissible, even if no further steps were taken"

It is not apparent to us how your figure of 80% has been reached. To avoid bias, we deliberately did not seek to overlay any interpretation in terms of grouping together responses to create percentages indicating sentiment one way or another; rather we were also open in providing all the key summary data, the responses in each category as well as identifying the mean and modal responses.

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

11th July 2019

I apologise for not being able to attend in person to ask this, being unable to find a vet to cover means that I cannot get away from the surgery today, but I am sufficiently concerned about the issue my question raises and the response to it that I feel it is imperative that this question is addressed. I look forward to your response.

The college has announced a review of the definition of "under my care". Given that there are very few genuine practitioners on council and that there are councillors with vested interests in remote selling, what assurances can the college give that the review of "Under My Care" will be carried out by those who actually do provide the care? In addition can the RCVS give assurances that "Standards Committee" will always contain a number of genuine practitioners without vested interests?

Sinead Armstrong
MA VetMB mRCVS



Mrs S M Armstrong Ma VetMB MRCVS
Ark Vets Ltd
445 Kingston Road
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Epsom
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KT19 0DB

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E-mail e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk
Website www.rcvs.org.uk

24 July 2019

Dear Mrs Armstrong,

With reference to your email of 11 July 2019 re: the RCVS Annual General Meeting (AGM), I confirm that we addressed a series of questions that we received via email the day before the AGM, of which your email was one.

We did so on this occasion, as it was felt they revealed some concern and confusion about Council's position in relation to telemedicine and remote prescribing. However, by accepting questions so close to the meeting does not establish a precedent going forward.

As was said at the meeting, we will publish your email and our response and make these available on-line via the AGM minutes.

Your question as read to the meeting was as follows:

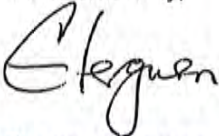
"What assurances can the College give that the review of 'under care' will be carried out by those who actually do provide care? In addition, can the RCVS give assurances that 'Standards Committee' will always contain a number of genuine practitioners without vested interests?"

Our response was as follows:

"The review of under care will be an open and inclusive process in which we will seek to engage across the veterinary professions. Any proposals that emerge from this review will be subject to a full consultation with the profession and public.

The veterinary profession has the privilege of self-regulation. By its nature, this means that all involved will have 'interests'. As with all aspects of their professional lives, the veterinary surgeons and nurses involved in decision-making at the College are expected to maintain the highest level of integrity and to make the health and welfare of animals paramount."

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

-----Original Message-----

From: Corrie McCann <c.mccann@rcvs.org.uk>

Sent: 10 July 2019 08:30

To: Amanda Boag [REDACTED] 'Niall Connell' [REDACTED] Stephen May [REDACTED]

Cc: Lizzie Lockett <L.Lockett@rcvs.org.uk>; Eleanor Ferguson <e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk>

Subject: FW: Concerns about RCVS procedures

Corrie McCann
Operations Director / Deputy Registrar
Operations Department
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-----Original Message-----

From: JOCK / MARGARET KEITH [REDACTED]

Sent: 10 July 2019 08:12

To: webmaster <webmaster@rcvs.org.uk>

Subject: Concerns about RCVS procedures

Dear sir/madam

As I do not have individual email addresses to hand I would like this email to be passed to Amanda Boag, Niall Connel and Stephen May.

I am:

Norman W J Keith, BVM&S. MRCVS
[REDACTED]

Firstly I am very concerned about the protocols and conduct of the RCVS council in its handling of its meetings. There should be a generally available declaration of interests relating to members' professional

and other pertinent matters and in the event of there being a conflict such members should be totally excluded from any debate and subsequent voting. It is my belief that this normal and well accepted principle has not been adhered to in discussions about certain critical matters notably so called telemedicine.

Secondly there is no way that telemedicine should be sanctioned in veterinary practice. It bears no comparison whatsoever to the triage operated by the NHS for example simply because signs and symptoms cannot be described by the patient. In addition to this the caller / owner is totally unqualified to adequately describe their pet's or farm animal's condition thereby potentially leading to a complete misinterpretation of the illness and this may have a serious welfare impact on the animal(s) involved.

I would like these points to be aired thoroughly at the upcoming RCVS day and the results of any ensuing discussion be readily available to members.

I am very aware of massive concern within the practising arm of the profession of these points and there can be no doubt that in the event of these matters not being given adequate time and attention with full reporting of such discussions there will be a justifiable question as to the fitness for purpose of the council.

Yours sincerely

Norman W J Keith

BY EMAIL TO:

Mr N W J Keith BVM&S MRCVS



Ref ECF/dw
Tel 020 7202 0718
E-mail e.ferguson@rcvs.org.uk
Website www.rcvs.org.uk

24 July 2019

Dear Mr Keith,

I am aware that you wrote to the Presidential Team on 10 July 2019 expressing your views and concerns relating to competing 'interests' with particular reference to the telemedicine debate.

I am also aware that Amanda Boag, as (then) President, replied to you the same day, and indeed has offered to discuss with you further if you wish. Where specific questions were submitted in advance, these were responded to in the course of the meeting, along with questions from the floor.

Although in different terms, the issue of 'vested interests' was one of the questions raised, and as per Amanda's reply to you, it was again confirmed that *"the veterinary profession has the privilege of self-regulation. By its nature, this means that all involved will have 'interests'. As with all aspects of their professional lives, the veterinary surgeons and nurses involved in decision-making at the College are expected to maintain the highest level of integrity and to make the health and welfare of animals paramount"*.

As you are aware, following Council's decision at its June meeting, we will shortly be undertaking a wide-ranging review of under care provisions (including telemedicine) and there will be an opportunity for your views to be part of that.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eleanor".

Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

Betavet Veterinary Centre
28 Bank Street
Alloa
FK10 1HH



11th July 2019

Dear President

At the meeting of Council in March 2019 it was adopted that regarding RCVS subcommittee meetings:

30 Observers will only be permitted at the discretion of the chair and will not have voting rights.

31 Members of the officer team do not have automatic rights to sit in on all committee meetings to signal confidence in the delegation process.

The reasons why these items were adopted is unclear.

Would the RCVS confirm that prior to the adoption of these articles that officers attending meetings of subcommittee did solely act as 'observers' (as recorded in the minutes of standards committee)?

As an observer they obviously would not have taken part in any of the discussions, nor would they have taken part in any vote (or sought to influence any vote).

Please would the RCVS president confirm that this understanding of the role of an observer was adhered to?

Subsequent to the decision of Council that it was necessary to signal confidence in the delegation process, can the president confirm that officers have not attended any Standards Committee meetings (their presence alone might have affected decisions and would display a lack of confidence in delegation)?

If officers have attended Standards meetings would the president please confirm that they did act purely as 'observers' as defined earlier?

Yours sincerely

William McColl BVM&S MRCVS

Mr W McColl BVM&S MRCVS
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24 July 2019

Dear Mr McColl,

Thank you for your letter of 11 July 2019 addressed to the President, which has been passed to me.

Prior to the minuted decision of Council adopted in March 2019 to which you refer, an Officer attending a committee meeting as an Observer (i.e. other than attending a committee to which they have been formally appointed as a member) was entitled to take part in the discussion, but was not entitled to vote. That remains the case, and is indeed the scope for any Observer, whether the person is an Officer or a member of Council attending a committee meeting.

Subsequent to March Council, there have been two meetings of Standards Committee, one in April and one in May. The President attended both meetings as an Observer as described above.

By way of background, every year when a new Presidential Team takes up Office, a member of that team will be designated to attend Standards/Education Committees as an Observer. In July 2018, Amanda Boag the [then] President, was designated to Standards Committee and Professor Stephen May as the [then] Senior Vice-President was designated to Education Committee. This is in line with a long-standing and historic convention to ensure those with the highest responsibility within Council are abreast of developments in these important areas.

I hope this clarifies matters for you.

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

Eleanor Ferguson

From: Corrie McCann
Sent: 12 July 2019 07:08
To: Lizzie Lockett; Amanda Boag; 'Niall Connell'; 'Christopher Sturgess'; Eleanor Ferguson
Cc: Ian Holloway; Anthony Roberts
Subject: FW: AGM

Corrie McCann
Operations Director / Deputy Registrar
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From: Tim Newton [REDACTED]
Sent: 11 July 2019 20:36
To: webmaster <webmaster@rcvs.org.uk>
Subject: AGM

Dear President and Registrar

Apologies for not being able to attend the RCVS AGM when I had fully intended to [REDACTED]

Please could I ask that the following question is read out to the AGM and discussed by those MRCVS's present?

Whilst I cannot attend I look forward to hearing reports of the discussions.

My question is as follows:-

It appears that legal advice received by the RCVS will not permit a discriminatory favouring of certain commercial organisations allowing them to avoid the requirements of the code of conduct regarding "under our care" – thus preventing the RCVS's planned launch of a trial of remote prescribing.

In response to this set-back the RCVS has announced a complete review of “under my care”.

The perception that this engenders is that RCVS’s aim with the review is to ensure changes such that remote prescribing becomes permissible.

Given the recognised conflicts of interest within RCVS council and the perception of a predetermined desired “end result”, should not any review of “under our care” be carried out by a completely independent body in order to preserve some vestige of perception of impartiality?

Once again I apologise for my absence and the late despatch of this question.

Best wishes

Tim Newton

Dr Tim Newton MRCVS
Veterinary Surgeon

BY EMAIL TO:

Dr T J Newton BVSc MRCVS



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24 July 2019

Dear Dr Newton,

Thank you for your email of 11 July 2019.

This asked for your questions to be raised at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). As I am sure you will understand, given that your email only arrived via our Webmaster link late in the evening the day before the meeting (when office staff had already left for the day), we were unable to include your question on the day.

Turning to your comments, set out as the pre-cursor to your question, I am saddened that these are based in speculation, misconception, and misunderstanding.

No decisions have been made, other than that there should be a wide-ranging review of under care involving engagement and consultation with all areas of the profession so that all views can be heard. Given the subject matter of the review, it seems entirely right and appropriate that this is carried out as proposed, rather than by the route you suggest by those outwith the profession, without a detailed knowledge and veterinary insight.

You have pointed to 'recognised' conflicts of interest as a barrier to such a review. However, as a self-regulating profession, it should be appreciated that *all* involved have 'interests'. As with aspects of their professional lives, veterinary surgeons and nurses involved in decision-making at the RCVS are expected to maintain the highest levels of integrity, where potential conflicts are openly declared and managed professionally.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eleanor".

Eleanor Ferguson

Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor

APEX VETS

— Where your pet is part of our family — 

11th July 2019

Dear Sir/Madam,

I very much wished to be present in person at RCVS day to ask the following question but will be unable to due to work commitments, and inability to find cover. I have the following question that I would like to be read out during open questions and would very much appreciate confirmation that this will be done. My question is this:

There has been considerable discussion regarding the perception of conflicts of interest of council members when discussing Remote Prescribing and Telemedicine.

To illustrate these concerns I would like to highlight some of the provisions of an employment contract similar to one which is likely to have been signed by a number of RCVS council members.

“The duties of your employment include, without limitation, a duty to act at all times in the best interests of the group. The “Business” of which was defined as meaning all commercial activities which are carried out, or may be carried out in the immediate or foreseeable future”

In addition there is a contractual duty to:-

“Always give the company and the group the full benefit of your knowledge”

If council members in this situation fail to pass on information that they become aware of to the group, then they are in breach of their employment contracts.

Can the President clarify how RCVS Council members would fail to have a conflict of interest if they continued to participate in meetings, or took part in votes that might promote the interests of their employer (or of a company of which they are a Director)?

Can the RCVS President confirm that in any discussion of Telemedicine that all council members with a potential serious and employment contractual conflict of interest did in fact recuse themselves from both the meeting itself and any associated votes?

Yours sincerely

Mr Douglas Paterson MRCVS

Director, Apex Vets LTD

BY EMAIL TO:

Mr D Paterson BVM&S MRCVS
Director,
Apex Vets Ltd

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7 August 2019

Dear Mr Paterson,

Thank you for your email and attached letter of 11 July 2019. I apologise for the delay in responding to you.

Your letter asked for your questions to be raised at the Annual General Meeting (AGM). As I am sure you will understand, given that your correspondence only arrived via our Webmaster link late in the evening the day before the meeting (when office staff had already left for the day), we were unable to include your questions on the day.

You have raised issues relating to 'interests' and conflicts of interest. As you are doubtless aware, the veterinary profession has the privilege of self-regulation so that RCVS Council is made up of individuals working within a variety of practice structures. By its nature this means that all involved will have 'interests' whatever their employment status and indeed if they work for themselves and, just because there is an 'interest' around an issue, does not automatically mean that there is a conflict. Taken to its logical conclusion, and if everyone with an interest were to recuse, there would be no-one left to be involved in the process.

The obligation on veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses on RCVS Council is to act with integrity for the benefit of animal health and welfare having declared their various interests – which can be seen on the RCVS website.

We do not see a conflict arising from Council members being sent papers for their consideration and respecting that confidentiality.

Yours sincerely,



Eleanor Ferguson
Registrar/Director of Legal Services
Solicitor