

ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS
VETERINARY NURSE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

INQUIRY RE:

MR GEORGE ASPEY (1)

MRS SUSAN HOWARTH (2)

DECISION OF DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE
ON FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Mr Aspey is a Registered Veterinary Nurse who qualified in 2017 and was first registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons ('the College') in March 2018.
2. Mrs Howarth is a Registered Veterinary Nurse who qualified in 1997 and is registered with the College.
3. The Allegations brought by the College were as follows:

George Aspey RVN

THAT, being registered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses, you:

1. On 18 February 2023 at My Pets Vets (Walter Leigh Way, WN7 3GP):
 - a. anaesthetised and/or monitored the anaesthetic of a dog called Nessa, belonging to Susan Howarth RVN, without direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon; and/or
 - b. prescribed and/or dispensed meloxicam (Metacam oral suspension), a prescription only medicine, to Nessa without the direction of or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon; and/or
 - c. made entries in the clinical records for your own dog, Chester Aspey, when those entries related to a procedure and/or medication given to Nessa;

2. Your conduct in 1(c) above:

a. was dishonest; and/or

b. was misleading;

AND THAT in relation to the matters set out above, whether individually or in any combination, you are guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

Charges against:

Susan Howarth RVN

THAT, being registered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses, you:

1. On 18 February 2023, at My Pets Vets (Walter Leigh Way, WN7 3GP):

- a. allowed your dog, Nessa, to be anaesthetised and/or undergo monitoring of anaesthesia by George Aspey RVN, without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon; and/or
- b. placed a cannula in Nessa without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon; and/or
- c. performed a descale and polish dental procedure on Nessa without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon;

AND THAT in relation to the matters set out above, whether individually or in any combination, you are guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

Background

4. It was alleged that, on 18.02.23, Mr Aspey, a Registered Veterinary Nurse ('RVN') brought Ms Howarth, a Registered Veterinary Nurse, the owner of a dog, Nessa, into My Pets Vets at Walter Leigh Way, WN7 3GP ('the Practice') without an appointment to see the veterinary surgeon, in order to perform a dental descale and polish on the dog. Ms Howarth, a RVN, was not employed by the Practice. Ms Howarth worked with Mr Aspey at Harper Adams University in another employment of Mr Aspey.
5. The College alleges that Mr Aspey anaesthetised Nessa, without veterinary direction and monitored the anaesthetic. Ms Howarth then carried out the dental procedure of a descale and polish.

Procedure and Admissions as to the Facts

6. At the start of the hearing, the Allegation was put to Mr Aspey, who admitted each of the facts the Allegation against him. Pursuant to Rule 23.5, the Committee accepted the admissions made and dispensed with proof of the matters admitted.
7. In the case of each sub-particular, 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) of the Allegation brought by the Royal College, Ms Howarth denied that the alleged act had occurred “*without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon*”. Ms Howarth admitted that she had on 18 February 2023: allowed her dog, Nessa, to be anaesthetised by Mr Aspey (1(a)); had placed a cannula in Nessa (1(b)); and had performed a descale and polish dental procedure on Nessa (1(c)). Pursuant to Rule 23.5, the Committee accepted the admissions made and dispensed with proof of the matters admitted.

Evidence

8. Since there were remaining facts still in issue in the Allegation against Ms Howarth, the College opened its case. The College called evidence from the following in person:

- Dr Kurt Houghton MRCVS
- Dr Sarah Underhill MRCVS

In addition, the College relied on the witness statements of the following, who were not required to attend to give oral evidence:

- Dr Caroline Davies MRCVS
- Ms Klaudia Miklaszewska MRCVS
- Dr Vasiliki Vagdatli MRCVS
- Ms Kay Waugh
- Mrs Phillipa Melling
- Ms Maria Hibbert RVN

9. The College further relied on the evidence of its expert witness, Dr Christine Shield, BVM&S, MRCVS. Dr Shield provided her written expert report, dated 13 June 2025 to the Committee and attended the hearing to give oral evidence and answer questions from the Committee.
10. Mr Aspey had admitted the facts and therefore did not adduce evidence to the Committee, beyond having provided a written statement dated 03 December 2025. Ms Howarth provided her witness statement to the Committee dated 01 December 2025 and also gave oral evidence before the Committee in the hearing.
11. Dr Houghton stated that he had been working his shift at the practice between 08.30 and 18.30 on 18 February 2023. He recalled that Mr Aspey had come into the Practice later that afternoon, but he did not recall anyone else. He did not recall any conversation with Mr Aspey. He accepted that it was possible that he may have gone in and out of the x-ray room. Dr Houghton stated that, at the time, he had been a newly-qualified member of staff.

12. In oral evidence Dr Houghton stated that he could not reliably confirm any contact with anyone in the preparation room. He did not have any recollection of being present when there was mention of the dog's weight, of drugs to be used, or performing the scale and polish. He did not recall Ms Howarth examining the dog's gums. He accepted it was possible that he had been in the room, but to his knowledge nothing had occurred to suggest that the dog had been under his care.
13. Dr Underhill stated that she had been working at the Practice on 18 February 2023. She stated that, as of February 2023, RVNs were allowed to do a scale and polish on dogs under veterinary supervision at the Practice. Dr Underhill recalled that, on 18 February 2023, she recalled Mr Aspey coming into the Practice with a lady and introducing her as someone who worked with him 'at the University'. The lady had a dog with her. Dr Underhill recalled that Mr Aspey and the lady were in the x-ray room and Dr Underhill was busy with other patients. She did not recall walking into the x-ray room at any point or discussing any procedure regarding the dog with Mr Aspey. Dr Underhill later found out that Mr Aspey had performed a scale and polish on the dog.
14. In oral evidence Dr Underhill told the Committee that she had no recollection of mention of the scale and polish, the pre-assessment or announcement of weight. Her only recollection was of Mr Aspey introducing someone from his University. Ms Howarth described in her evidence assisting Dr Houghton in a pregnancy ultrasound examination. Dr Underhill confirmed that she had been called in to confer with the Ms Howarth and Dr Houghton regarding this examination.
15. Dr Davies is an employed Clinical Director at the Practice, having initially set it up with her husband, prior to sale to Linnaeus, a large veterinary group in February 2023. She stated that Mr Aspey had joined the Practice on June 2018 as a locum RVN, had been employed full-time from September 2018 and for a time had been Acting Practice Manager. He had later become part-time at the Practice as an RVN.
16. Dr Davies had received a report from the Practice Manager and made a report to Linnaeus concerning Mr Aspey having brought Ms Howarth to the Practice, having anaesthetised a dog and performed a procedure. Dr Davies had conducted an investigation and spoken to the vets on duty on 18 February 2023.
17. Ms Miklaszewska was a vet who had been on duty on 18 February 2023 at the Practice. She recalled Mr Aspey being present with a woman. She had received assistance from Mr Aspey with some tasks during her shift.
18. Dr Vagdatli was a vet who had been on duty on 18 February 2023 at the Practice. He recalled Mr Aspey being present with a vet nurse, not employed there, who was introduced to him. Dr Vagdatli had been told by Mr Aspey that he and the RVN had performed a 'quick dental' on the RVN's dog.
19. Ms Waugh was the Practice Administrator. She recalled Mr Aspey calling her to ask if the Practice did staff discounts, which she then confirmed with the Practice, via another person.

20. Ms Waugh recalled Mr Aspey coming to the Practice on 18 February 2023 with a woman in 'peachy coloured' scrubs and a dog. Ms Waugh stated that she was told they were performing a dental on the dog and heard them discussing the amount of anaesthetic to administer. Ms Waugh later reported concerns to the Practice Manager, who took over the matter.
21. Ms Melling is the Practice Manager. She received a report from Ms Waugh and contacted Mr Aspey, who admitted having brought Ms Howarth to the Practice without seeking prior permission. She conducted a disciplinary interview with Mr Aspey on 24 February 2023, in the presence of Ms Hibbert. Ms Melling exhibited a note of the meeting and copies from Mr Aspey's dog's clinical records and invoices.

22. Dr Shield, in her expert report, set out that

"6. As set out in section 4.2 of the guidance notes to RCVS Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons (CoC), the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 (as amended) (VMRs) are the relevant legislation that underpins the use of medicines in animals. Section 4.7 of the guidance to the CoC says "POM-V [Prescription Only Medicine-Veterinary] medicines must be prescribed by a veterinary surgeon, who must first carry out a clinical assessment of the animal under their care". In the context of this case, the meloxicam that was dispensed by Mr Aspey together with all sedative and anaesthetic drugs are POM-Vs.

7. Schedule 3 of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 permits a veterinary surgeon to delegate certain minor acts of veterinary surgery to specified lay people, including RVNs. It requires that the RVN must be acting under the direction of a veterinary surgeon who has the animal in question under their care, who employs them or represents their employer and who has satisfied themselves that the RVN is qualified to carry out the treatment or surgery. In the context of this case, the relevant minor acts of veterinary surgery are dentistry, the placing of an intravenous cannula and the induction and maintenance of anaesthesia.

8. A veterinary surgeon should only delegate a task to an RVN if both parties are satisfied as to the delegatee's competence: section 18.7 of the guidance to the CoC says "The veterinary surgeon must also be sure that they will be available to answer any call for assistance, and finally, should be satisfied that the nurse feels capable of carrying out the procedure competently and successfully." Importantly, section 18.6 of the guidance notes to the CoC says clearly that "A veterinary nurse or student veterinary nurse is not entitled independently to undertake either medical treatment or minor surgery."

9. Regarding the induction of anaesthesia, section 18.9 of the guidance to the CoC says "18.9 Veterinary nurses and student veterinary nurses may be directed to assist veterinary surgeons with the maintenance of anaesthesia and the monitoring of patients under

anaesthesia. The following advice applies to these tasks:

- *Inducing anaesthesia by administration of a specific quantity of medicine directed by a veterinary surgeon may be carried out by a veterinary nurse or, with supervision, a student veterinary nurse, but not any other person.*
- *Administering medicine incrementally or to effect, to induce and maintain anaesthesia may be carried out only by a veterinary surgeon.”*

10. Turning to the monitoring and maintenance of anaesthesia, section 18.9 of the guidance to the CoC says “Maintaining anaesthesia is the responsibility of a veterinary surgeon, but a suitably trained person may assist by acting as the veterinary surgeon’s hands (to provide assistance which does not involve practising veterinary surgery), for example, by moving dials.” It goes on to say “Monitoring a patient during anaesthesia and the recovery period is the responsibility of the veterinary surgeon, but may be carried out on their behalf by a suitably trained person”. It adds “The most suitable person to assist a veterinary surgeon to monitor and maintain anaesthesia is a veterinary nurse or, under supervision, a student veterinary nurse.”

11. With regard to dentistry, section 18.13 of the guidance to the CoC says “Veterinary nurses and student veterinary nurses working under the direction of a veterinary surgeon may carry out routine dental hygiene work.” but goes on to say in section 18.14 “The extraction of teeth using instruments may readily become complicated and should only be carried out by veterinary surgeons. The RCVS considers that the extraction of teeth using instruments is not within the meaning of “minor surgery” in Schedule 3.”

23. In oral evidence, Dr Shield told the Committee that she had held many locum positions involving all the procedures of small animal practice. She had last been involved in inducing anaesthesia about 12 months ago. Dr Shield said that in practical terms the practices described at My Pets Vets based on the admission gave no particular problem, except that they were illegal and should not be occurring. Dr Shield said that she was particularly concerned to hear that the anaesthetic that the RVNs had used was propofol.

24. In his witness statement, Mr Aspey stated that Ms Howarth had stated that she did not expect a discount on the treatment. He acknowledged that he should have registered Ms Howarth and her dog. He accepted that a veterinary surgeon should have made a clinical assessment of Nessa and directed the procedure. Mr Aspey accepted that it was wrong to have put the entry onto his own dog’s account and applied his staff discount.

25. In her witness statement, Ms Howarth stated she had told Mr Aspey she expected to be treated as a ‘proper client, I’m not expecting mates’ rates’. She had attended the Practice and been introduced to those present. Mr Aspey had announced the procedure to be carried out. She felt that the actions fell within the usual scope of

practice of an RVN working under direction 'within a vet-led team'. Ms Howarth stated that she had reasonably believed that Mr Aspey had obtained permission both for Nessa's procedure and for her involvement in her care.

26. Later, in comments to the College dated 03 April 20[24] Ms Howarth stated that whilst she was aware that the 'Vet (Kurt)' had not explicitly examined her dog during formal consultation appointment, he had been present and she interpreted this as informal consultation.
27. Ms Howarth, in giving oral evidence, added that she believed that from the interactions with Dr Houghton, Nessa was under his care. She had felt like she was 'in the team' at the Practice on the day of Nessa's procedure.
28. Mr Collis, on behalf of the College submitted that the central issue was whether all three acts had been performed without direction and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon. He submitted that there was a difference between paragraphs 1(a) on the one hand and 1(b) and 1(c) in that the latter had been performed by Ms Howarth herself. He submitted that there had in fact been no direction by a registered veterinary surgeon. In relation to 1(b) and 1(c) the requirement that Ms Howarth was not employed prevented a valid direction. He referred the Committee to the Guidance.
29. Ms Howarth submitted that smooth running of a practice would be hampered if there had to be a direction on even the smallest action. She submitted that, had Nessa been properly booked in with the Practice, matters would have been different. Ms Howarth submitted that she did have sufficient competence to carry out the procedures in issue.
30. The Legal Assessor advised the Committee that it had accepted the facts as admitted by each Respondent and had dispensed with further proof, in accordance with Rule 23.5. As a result, the Committee could find all the facts against Mr Aspey proved. In relation to Ms Howarth, the Committee had accepted her admissions to facts, but parts of the Allegation were denied.
31. The burden of proving the factual allegations still in issue lay on the College. The College had to meet the 'higher civil standard' in proving the remaining allegations, so that the Committee was 'sure'.
32. The Legal Assessor advised that the Committee had to determine whether the College had met the burden of proof so that it was sure that the alleged actions had occurred without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon. In so doing, he advised, the Committee should have regard to the relevant legislation, Code and Guidance which considered these issues. The Committee could also take into account the expert opinion of Dr Shield. He advised the Committee to make findings as to what had occurred at the Practice, based on its assessment of the evidence.
33. The Committee considered that the central issue which it had to decide in respect of the facts still in issue against Ms Howarth was whether it was sure that the admitted acts in paragraphs 1(a), 1(b) and/or 1(c) had occurred "*without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon*".

34. In so doing, the Committee decided, it was proper to have regard to the expert evidence and also the provisions of the legislation and guidance, specifically the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 ('the Act') (in particular Schedule 3) the Code of Conduct for Registered Veterinary Nurses ('Code') and the supporting Guidance. There was also reference to the Veterinary Medicine Regulations (2013) (as amended).
35. The Committee decided to make findings on the evidence which it accepted as to the events which had occurred at the Practice on 18 February 2023.
36. The Committee considered that Dr Houghton had not been able to assist it particularly, as he had told the Committee that he now had no real recollection of the events. Dr Houghton suggested in his witness statement that his first awareness of matters had come in September 2023, but this was inconsistent with Dr Davies account that she had spoken to all the vets on duty shortly after the incident, which Dr Houghton did not recall. His statement was that Mr Aspey had attended in the afternoon of 18 February 2023, but other witnesses had stated that the attendance was in the morning.
37. Dr Underhill had no detailed recollection of events on 18 February 2023. She had told the Committee that, it was not customary, on a case-by-case basis an RVN might have induced anaesthesia in the Practice. This was, to some extent, consistent with Dr Davies' statement that at the time, RVNs were allowed to perform scale and polish dental procedures under veterinary direction. Dr Davies' evidence was that induction of anaesthesia was by an RVN under veterinary supervision and monitoring under veterinary direction.
38. The Committee considered that Ms Howarth gave evidence with impressive detail and this had been a relatively unusual event for her, in attending a Practice at which she was not employed and performing a procedure on her own dog. In comparison, the Committee took into account, the other witnesses were recalling events which related to their general employment at the Practice. During the time of the events, the veterinary surgeons and others had had other work to attend to, which drew their attention.
39. The Committee found Ms Howarth to be consistent in giving her evidence. For these reasons, when comparing Ms Howarth's recollection of events with Dr Houghton's lack of recall, the Committee preferred her account of what had occurred within the Practice on 18 February 2023.
40. The Committee also took into account the apparent agreement between the College's evidence and Ms Howarth's evidence, that a dental scale and polish was a fairly low-level procedure and one which RVNs were accustomed to be the persons actually carrying out the procedure. The Committee accepted Ms Howarth's evidence that it was a procedure well within her competencies and experience to have carried out.
41. Based on its assessment of Ms Howarth's evidence and because Mr Aspey had also confirmed it in his statement, the Committee also accepted that Ms Howarth had asked Mr Aspey that she should not be afforded any particular discount for the procedure.

The Committee considered that this was also consistent with Ms Howarth's evidence that she had expected that Mr Aspey would obtain permission for the procedure to be carried out at the Practice.

42. The Committee accepted Ms Howarth's evidence that she and Mr Aspey had been open and candid about the intended procedure with those they encountered at the Practice on 18 February 2023. This was consistent with the evidence of Ms Waugh and Dr Vagdatli.
43. The Committee therefore found that Ms Howarth had attended the Practice on 18 February 2023, wearing her RVN scrubs, with her qualification 'badges' as described. It found that there had been an openness about the procedure which was to take place and an open discussion (albeit between Mr Aspey and Ms Howarth) about anaesthetising Nessa. The Committee accepted Ms Howarth's evidence about her having herself carried out an initial assessment of Nessa, noting that she conceded not having taken a 'temperature' but made other relevant observations pre-operatively. The Committee accepted that there was a custom of RVNs inducing anaesthesia, albeit subject to the issue of veterinary direction.
44. The Committee also accepted that it was likely that Ms Howarth did have a conversation with Dr Houghton about Nessa, as he came into and out of the x-ray room.
45. The Committee heard and accepted Ms Howarth's evidence, taking all of the above into account, that she had a genuine belief that it was appropriate for her to have taken part in the dental scale and polish. It accepted her account that she believed that permission had been obtained for her to attend the Practice for the procedure on her dog.
46. Ms Howarth had admitted, and the Committee had dispensed with further proof that, on 18 February 2023, she had:
 - allowed Nessa, to be anaesthetised and undergo monitoring of anaesthesia by Mr Aspey;
 - placed a cannula in Nessa; and
 - performed a descale and polish dental procedure on Nessa
47. The sole issue for the Committee was whether these matters had occurred without direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon. The Committee considered that certain veterinary procedures are controlled by law. Specifically, the Committee had regard to and accepted the expert advice of Dr Shield.
48. Dr Shield had stated that the use of medicines in animals is underpinned by the Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013, that 'POM-V' medicines must be prescribed by a veterinary surgeon after assessment and that sedative and anaesthetic drugs are POM-Vs. Dr Shield had also stated that Schedule 3 of the Act allows certain

delegations subject to direction by a veterinary surgeon. This also has the requirement that:

- The animal is under the care of a veterinary surgeon ('VS')
- The VS employs the RVN or represents the employer
- The VS has satisfied themselves that the RVN is qualified to carry out the treatment or surgery

The Committee accepted Dr Shield's expert opinion, as being consistent with the Guidance referred to, that the dentistry, the placing of an intravenous cannula and the induction and maintenance of anaesthesia fell within these requirements.

49. The Committee took into account Mr Aspey's admission and the evidence to the effect that, Nessa not having been formally booked into the Practice, no such care by a veterinary surgeon had existed. It followed that there was not a direction in fact. The Committee found that Ms Howarth's belief was based on relying on actions she believed Mr Aspey had taken but had not.
50. Although the Committee accepted Ms Howarth's account of the interactions with Dr Houghton, and that these have tended to confirm her belief, the Committee did not find that these interactions amounted to any veterinary surgeon having taken Nessa under their care. The College had adduced evidence, which the Committee accepted, that none of the veterinary surgeons on duty at the Practice on 18 February 2023, had Nessa under their care.
51. In relation to paragraphs 1(b) and 1(c), which related to actions carried out by Ms Howarth, she had not been under the employment of Linnaeus and so, could not have been acting under the direction of any of the veterinary surgeons present.
52. Further, taking Ms Howarth's evidence at its highest, the Committee did not consider that her evidence had amounted to any veterinary surgeon having supervised any of the actions in paragraphs 1(a), 1(b) and/or 1(c) of the Allegation. The Committee considered that, having experience herself and working with Mr Aspey, also an experienced RVN, any supervision had been by Mr Aspey alone.
53. The Committee found that, in the case of each of paragraphs 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) the College had persuaded the Committee so that it was sure that these actions had occurred without the direction of and/or supervision by a registered veterinary surgeon.
54. The Committee found the factual paragraphs 1(a), 1(b) and 1(c) of the Allegation against Ms Howarth proved.
55. The degree of culpability of Ms Howarth alluded to above will be a key factor when determining whether any of the facts found proved amount to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

56. The Committee having found facts proved in relation to both Allegations will now go on to consider whether this amounts to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE
17 DECEMBER 2025