

ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

INQUIRY RE:

STEPHANIE HAZELWOOD RVN

DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

1. Ms Hazelwood was due to appear before the Disciplinary Committee (“the Committee”) to answer the following Charge:

That, being registered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses, and whilst in practice at VetsNow Ipswich, 1 Tommy Flowers Drive, Hartree Way, Suffolk, IP5 2BZ you:

1. Between 8 April 2021 and 12 August 2021, took the following items from Orwell Veterinary Group without paying for the same:

- a. On or around 17 April 2021, two bags of PPEC Expert Care Canine ad Derm/sens Salmon 10 kg;

- b. On or around 30 April 2021, a bag of Feline Gastrointestinal Hairball 4kg;

- c. On or around 12 August 2021 a bag of Feline Gastrointestinal Hairball 4kg;

2. On or around 27 July 2021, ordered and/or took from Orwell Veterinary Group Bravecto, a POM-V medication, without:

- a. paying for the same;

- b. a prescription from a veterinary surgeon for such medication;

3. Your conduct above:

a. in relation to (1)(a) and/or 1(b) and/or 1(c) and/or 2(a) was dishonest; and/or

b. in relation to 2(b) risked undermining procedures and/or /regulations and/or /rules designed to protect animal welfare;

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

Preliminary matters

Service

2. Miss Curtis appeared on behalf of the College. Ms Hazelwood did not attend, nor was she represented. Miss Curtis took the Committee through the documents sent to Ms Hazelwood and submitted that service had been carried out in accordance with the Rules.
3. The Committee heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor, who detailed the service requirements contained within the Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Practitioners (Disciplinary Committee) (Procedure and Evidence) Rules 2004 (“the Rules”).
4. The Committee had sight of an email dated 14 June 2022, sent to Ms Hazelwood at her registered email address, giving notice of the hearing. The Notice of Inquiry was also included within the Inquiry Bundle sent to Ms Hazelwood on 12 July 2022 by Special Delivery. Ms Hazelwood responded to both and it was clear she had received the Notice and accompanying documentation. The Notice contained the matters set out within the Rules and had been served more than 28 days in advance of the hearing. The Committee was therefore satisfied that service of the Notice of Inquiry had been carried out in accordance with the Rules.

Proceeding in absence

5. Miss Curtis applied to proceed in the absence of Ms Hazelwood and provided the Committee with detailed written submissions, which were read into the record.
6. The Committee heard and accepted the legal advice from the Legal Assessor, who referred it to the cases of R v Jones [2003] 1 A.C. 1, Tait v Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons [2003] UKPC

34 and the General Medical Council v Adeogba [2016] EWCA Civ 162, and the principles to be considered when deciding whether or not to proceed in the absence of a Respondent.

7. At the end of May and beginning of June 2022, the RCVS had email exchanges with Ms Hazelwood in relation to listing this matter for hearing. The exchanges included discussion as to whether Ms Hazelwood wished to attend. The Clerk to the Disciplinary Committee explained that the hearing could take place virtually if she could not attend in person.
8. By email dated 7 June 2022, Ms Hazelwood confirmed as follows to the Clerk to the Disciplinary Committee:

“Thank you for the option. I would rather the meeting continues to take place in August without my presence.”

9. The Notice of Inquiry was sent to Ms Hazelwood on 14 June 2022, by email. She replied by email on 15 June 2022, with a Notice of Acknowledgement stating she would not attend the hearing.
10. As mentioned above, the Notice of Inquiry was also included within the Inquiry Bundle, which was sent to Ms Hazelwood at her registered address on 12 July 2022, by special delivery. On 13 July 2022, Ms Hazelwood replied by email to the letter enclosing the bundles, as follows:

“Thank you for sending through the documents. I noticed in the folder containing unused documents that the character statements are in this file and not being used. I would like the character statements to be used and the emails I have sent to the RCVS.

I fully acknowledge my actions and I have not throughout the investigate [sic] disputed these at all and have admitted the charges against me.

I have explained to the RCVS that I am unable to attend the meeting as I am working full time and careering [sic] for family. I can not afford to take unpaid leave. I also do not have legal representation as i can not pay for it and the VDS have declined to assist me.

All the information I have towards the investigation has been provided to the RCVS. I hope that the outcome takes into consideration that I will have been out of practice for a year and have been unable to find work as a veterinary nurse.”

11. The Committee noted that Ms Hazelwood faced serious allegations, there was a clear public interest in the matter being dealt with expeditiously and there were three witnesses on standby. The Committee considered an adjournment would serve no useful purpose, because it seemed most unlikely that Ms Hazelwood would attend on another occasion. Furthermore, the Committee noted she had not requested an adjournment. In light of Ms Hazelwood’s clear decision not to attend the hearing the Committee decided that she had voluntarily waived her right to be present

and her right to be represented at this hearing. The Committee took into account the fact that it had a 'Respondent's Bundle' in which Ms Hazelwood had provided written submissions and references and the Committee would take these into account when reaching its decisions.

12. The Committee concluded that it was in the interests of justice that the matter should proceed notwithstanding the absence of Ms Hazelwood. The Committee would draw no adverse inference from her non-attendance and would take into account the documents within the papers that furthered her case.

Application for part of the hearing to be in private

13. Within the documents provided by Ms Hazelwood there was reference to health and personal matters that might ordinarily be dealt with in private session. Since Ms Hazelwood was not present, Miss Curtis made an application on her behalf that any reference to her health or personal family matters be heard in private.
14. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor that whilst these proceedings are ordinarily conducted in public, so that the public are aware of the functions being carried out by the Regulator, there was provision within the Rules to allow the hearing to go into private session where to do so was in the interests of justice. The interests of justice can include protecting the private life of a respondent and matters relating to health are often dealt with in private for that reason. The Committee was satisfied that it was appropriate that any health or personal family matters be dealt with in private. Accordingly, where such matters were raised the Committee would go into private session.

Admissions

15. Miss Curtis invited the Committee to find all the alleged facts proved on the basis of the admissions made by Ms Hazelwood, both during the investigation and after the Inquiry Bundle had been sent to her.
16. The Committee heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor, who emphasised the importance of the Committee being satisfied that any admissions made were unequivocal before accepting them and dispensing with the need for the College to prove the matters alleged.
17. In a letter dated 25 October 2021, Ms Hazelwood said to the College:

"I acknowledge the actions I have undertaken in relation to the theft of pet food and prescription flea control are classed as misconduct and dishonesty. I can not begin to express the level of disappointment and failure that I feel towards my own actions. I fully accept that my actions were of such that has caused a breach of the RCVS code of conduct and that on my part a failing to ensure the veterinary nurse profession and its reputation being upheld."

18. In an email dated 26 April 2022, Ms Hazelwood said:

"I fully acknowledge the actions I took were dishonest and below rcvs standards."

19. In an email dated 13 July 2022, Ms Hazelwood said:

"I fully acknowledge my actions and I have not throughout the investigate disputed these at all and have admitted the charges against me." (sic)

20. In an email dated 18 August 2022, Ms Hazelwood added:

"I have expressed how deeply ashamed I am of my actions and have spent the past 12 months heavily reflecting on this."

21. The Committee noted that, to her credit, Ms Hazelwood had taken responsibility for her actions and admitted all the matters alleged against her. The Committee was satisfied that the admissions were clear and unequivocal and furthermore were supported by the cogent evidence relied on by the College.

22. The Committee therefore found all the facts alleged proved on the basis of Ms Hazelwood's admissions, as supported by the evidence provided. The Committee would thus consider whether Ms Hazelwood's conduct amounted to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect without the need for the College to call evidence to prove the facts.

Background

23. Miss Curtis then proceeded to open the case on behalf of the College, relying on written submissions that were read into the record.

24. At all times material to the allegations before the Committee Ms Hazelwood was registered as a veterinary nurse.

25. At the time of the matters set out in the allegations, Ms Hazelwood was employed as a Registered Veterinary Nurse ("RVN") by Ipswich VetsNow ("VetsNow"). VetsNow provided out of hours '

services to a number of other local veterinary practices, including the Orwell Veterinary Group (“OVG”) based in Grange Farm, Kesgrave, Suffolk. Ms Hazelwood worked for VetsNow from January 2020 to August 2021. Previously, namely from December 2017 to December 2018, Ms Hazelwood had been employed as an RVN by OVG.

26. VetsNow did not have its own premises, but was instead based in OVG’s building, using OVG’s facilities during evenings and weekends. Apart from working out of the same building, the two businesses operated independently from each other: for example, Vets Now had a separate clinical record system, telephone line and staff. VetsNow staff were, however, able to access OVG’s clinical records for the purpose of care for any animals registered with OVG which were presented out of hours. As VetsNow provided an out of hours ’service, there was a limited overlap in the hours worked by VetsNow staff and OVG staff, but there were handover points in the evenings and mornings, and at the start and end of weekends.
27. VetsNow brought its own medication and other supplies to OVG when they started their out of hours ’shifts. They would only use supplies from the host practice, OVG, in an emergency and/or if they did not have the relevant item themselves.
28. Ms Hazelwood, having previously worked at OVG, was familiar with its processes, including ordering medicines and other items from suppliers. When working for VetsNow, she had access to those same systems, as the two organisations worked out of the same building. Since leaving OVG, however, she had no legitimate reason to access OVG’s stock-ordering systems. She remained a client of OVG, in that several of her own animals were registered with OVG, but had no status with OVG beyond that of client.
29. In April 2021, OVG staff noticed that there had been an order for some pet food for Ms Hazelwood’s cat, Ernie, but that there had been no charge made to her client account. They kept a look-out for any similar issues, and in due course there were two further incidents in July and August 2021 respectively, where items of stock were ordered for Ms Hazelwood, but not put into her account. They also found that there had been one similar incident earlier in April 2021. They alerted VetsNow, and provided evidence in the form of screenshots and stills from CCTV footage. VetsNow brought disciplinary action against Ms Hazelwood, during which she admitted that she had ordered items using the OVG Practice Management System, and had taken the items ordered but failed to pay for them.
30. The OVG process for ordering items from a supplier involved entering details into the practice management system, including the item, animal and owner. The system then automatically generated a label for the item, showing these details. The label would be stored in a specific

drawer until the supplier delivered the item to OVG. Once the item arrived, a member of staff would attach the label to the item, ready for dispensing to the owner.

31. Ms Hazelwood had knowledge of this system from her previous employment with OVG. By her own admission, she used that knowledge to place orders for a number of items she wanted for her pets, thereby generating a label. She then deleted the order from her client account, so no charge was shown. The order for the item went ahead despite the deletion, and the label was fixed onto it when it arrived. She would then take the item without paying for it.
32. OVG staff gathered evidence for each of the incidents. This took the form of photographs of the labels generated in Ms Hazelwood's name, photographs of the items with the labels attached, and stills from CCTV footage showing Ms Hazelwood leaving the practice. These stills showed her on occasion carrying an object appearing to be a large bag of pet food, and on occasion carrying a bag large enough to contain bags of pet food.
33. The College alleged that Ms Hazelwood took the items dishonestly and she has accepted as much.
34. The College also alleged that in relation to the POM-V, Bravecto, (Prescription Only Medicine), there was an additional factor of ordering and taking the medication without a prescription, and that this risked undermining procedures, regulations and rules designed to protect animal welfare. Again, this has been admitted by Ms Hazelwood. The evidence indicated that no veterinary surgeon was involved in the order for Bravecto. This evidence included the clinical records for Norman, one of Ms Hazelwood's cats, which showed no entries of veterinary input at OVG other than Norman having been weighed. It also included evidence from OVG to the effect that there is no record of a veterinary surgeon prescribing this item for Norman. In addition, Ms Hazelwood admitted at the VetsNow disciplinary hearing that there had been no veterinary prescription.
35. As referred to above, in the letter dated 25 October 2021, Ms Hazelwood said to the College:

"I acknowledge the actions I have undertaken in relation to the theft of pet food and prescription flea control are classed as misconduct and dishonesty. I can not begin to express the level of disappointment and failure that I feel towards my own actions. I fully accept that my actions were of such that has caused a breach of the RCVS code of conduct and that on my part a failing to ensure the veterinary nurse profession and its reputation being upheld.

My actions are inexcusable and there is no way in which to justify what I did other than a major lapse in judgement due to an extremely stressful and overwhelming period in my life around that area of time in which I committed the offences. I had been in the Veterinary industry for 16 years with an unblemished career, I started working in the veterinary industry as soon as I was old enough to work. I have constantly worked in practice, even at one point of my career commuting from abroad each month and returning to the UK to work nights for one week a month.

This is the only career I have ever known and I am not trained in anything else. I have never performed inadequately, or caused any issues within any of my jobs. I have always upheld a high level of patient care and had some incredibly valued relationships with clients and their pets. I have never had a disciplinary, client complaint or any concerns regarding my job performance. I have always undertaken CPD, staff training, Staff meetings and staff events. I regularly assisted with additional shifts and was always willing to work overtime, including cancelling holiday to ensure other staffing needs were met. The actions I had taken between April 2021 and August 2021 were completely out of character for me and something I am deeply ashamed of. I can provide character statements ascertaining to my true nature and my ethic for work should they be needed. I have always been a hardworking and compassionate veterinary nurse often going out of my way to help other staff and clients to ensure they receive the best level of care.

Any one who knows me knows that my pets are my complete world and I would never in anyway imaginable do anything that would harm them or put them at risk. I put my pets health and wellbeing above my own and during the time was struggling with a multitude of issues but wanted to ensure my pets were fine. My two dogs (Mabel and Wally) and my two cats (Ernie and Norman) were registered at Orwell vets, with all of my pets except Norman at the time being registered to their healthcare plans. The intention was to register Norman onto the monthly care plan too to ensure he would have regular routine health care and follow the same plan as my other pets. All of my pets have visited the practice on regular occasion although I acknowledge Norman was not seen by an Orwell Veterinary surgeon, Mabel and Wally would come to work with me on every shift. I acknowledge that the flea treatment and food I fraudulently took from Orwell was a breach of conduct and I can not begin to describe the level of anger and disgust I feel towards myself for breaching the code of conduct and letting the profession down.

I acknowledge that the past 8 months of my personal life spilled over into my professional life and as such caused me to undertake the actions that I did. Reflecting back on the events I acknowledge I should have reached out and spoken to staff, the clinic and asked for assistance. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] *When I did finally move into my current property beginning of March 2021 I encountered multiple issues, My kitchen had been flooded from a pipe leak, the property was left damp and dirty. Within a few weeks of moving in I also began having issues with my neighbours consistently arguing through all hours of the day, on some instances into the early hours of the morning, this made it increasingly difficult to sleep between night shifts and on days off.*

- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]

- [Redacted]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I am deeply ashamed of my actions and the way in which I conducted myself, I am a hard working individual who has never let myself, staff or clinics down in the past. I offer my sincere apologise to all those involved and affected by my actions. The level of disappointment I feel in myself and the way I conducted myself is beyond measurable. I am aware my actions are serious and amount to gross misconduct, I am willing to do anything necessary to rectify my actions. I am aware that I may lose my veterinary nurse registration and I am completely devastated by the fact this may happen. I know nothing other than a career in Veterinary. I have been trying to apply for nursing roles since I was let go from Vets Now in August 2021 and when I had applied for roles I had ensured I was honest with future employers regarding the RCVS situation, However with the RCVS case it is proving difficult and as such has resulted in me being rejected from a variety of veterinary roles. As of yet I am still unable to work in practice within the local area and am currently no longer working as a practicing registered veterinary nurse and am no longer working in a veterinary practice. I am finding it increasingly hard to identify a life without being a veterinary nurse and the notion that my veterinary career maybe over is something that I am reflecting on daily. I understand the implications my actions have had on my future as a veterinary nurse and I am deeply ashamed of how I have conducted myself and how poorly I upheld the RCVS code of conduct. Failure to act appropriately has had a negative impact on the practice involved and also my veterinary career.

I hope that there is a way in which I can rectify what has happened. I have paid back the clinic involved the fees for the products that were stolen, I was issued a community resolution order by the police which was closed due to paying back the product value. I have paid the full outstanding amount for my pets health care plans as they were registered there but have since been moved to another practice. I once again apologise for actions I undertook and I can not begin to express the level of failure I feel towards myself and the fact I let the profession down.” (sic)

The Charge

36. The Charge being admitted in full, there was no necessity for any further submissions on the facts.

The Committee's determination on the Charge

37. As indicated above under the heading 'Admissions', the Committee found the charge proved on the basis of Ms Hazelwood's admissions, as supported by the evidence relied on by the College.

Disgraceful Conduct in a Professional Respect

38. Miss Curtis, on behalf of the College, submitted to the Committee that Ms Hazelwood's conduct was dishonest, it constituted both a breach of trust and an abuse of her position with regards to access to veterinary medicines and it involved a risk to animal welfare. It also jeopardised the position and reputation of her colleagues. Ms Curtis said that, in addition, it involved an element of premeditation and it was sustained over a period of time. She said the behaviour fell far short of the conduct expected of a member of the profession and amounts to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

39. The Committee noted that in her letter of 25 October 2021, Ms Hazelwood said:

"I acknowledge the actions I have undertaken in relation to the theft of pet food and prescription flea control are classed as misconduct and dishonesty.

I fully accept that my actions were of such that has caused a breach of the RCVS code of conduct and that on my part a failing to ensure the veterinary nurse profession and its reputation being upheld.

I am aware my actions are serious and amount to gross misconduct."

40. In her email dated 26 April 2022, Ms Hazelwood said that she fully acknowledged that her actions were dishonest and that they fell below the standards of the RCVS.

The Committee's Determination on Disgraceful Conduct in a Professional Respect

41. The Committee considered with care the submissions made by Ms Curtis, together with all the evidence presented and the material provided by Ms Hazelwood. It was cognisant of the fact that the question of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect was very much a matter for its own judgment and that there was no burden or standard of proof that applied. However it did take into account Ms Hazelwood's acknowledgement that her conduct fell below the standards of the RCVS. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor and took into account the

Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses (“the Code”), together with its Supporting Guidance.

42. The Committee found Ms Hazelwood had breached the following parts of the Code:

1.5 Veterinary nurses who supply and administer medicines must do so responsibly.

6.5 Veterinary nurses must not engage in any activity or behaviour that would be likely to bring the profession into disrepute or undermine public confidence in the profession.

43. Veterinary nurses, by virtue of their professional position, are entrusted with access to medication, including Prescription Only Medicines. It is of fundamental importance that members of the public and colleagues can rely on registered veterinary nurses not to abuse that trust. The Committee noted that POMs attract specific legal restrictions and a higher level of control and responsibility than medicines that can be purchased over-the-counter. These restrictions are in place to guard against the risks that unauthorised use may present, both to humans and animals.

44. As part of her professional role, Ms Hazelwood was entrusted with access to POMs. In the Committee’s view, Ms Hazelwood’s conduct represented a serious abuse of the trust placed in her with regards to veterinary medicines.

45. The Code provides that one of the five key principles that must be maintained by registrants is “*honesty and integrity*”. The Disciplinary Committee’s Procedure Guidance (at paragraph 76) provides:

“Proven dishonesty has been held to come at the ‘top end’ of the spectrum of gravity of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect. In such cases, the gravity of the matter may flow from the possible consequences of the dishonesty as well as the dishonesty itself. The Privy Council has, in a case involving dishonesty, provided guidance on the distinction between removal and suspension from the register.”

46. The Committee noted that the dishonest conduct in this case related directly to Ms Hazelwood’s professional life, as she stole from her former employer, by abusing the trust placed in her by her current employer. The Committee considered this constituted a serious abuse of trust.

47. The Committee was of the view that members of the public would be concerned to learn that a registered veterinary nurse had taken items, including POM-V, drugs from their former employer, by abusing their current position of employment and using inside knowledge gained when

employed by their former employer. The Committee considered that the reputation of the profession would be undermined, as would public confidence in the profession by these actions.

48. The Committee considered what factors either aggravated or mitigated Ms Hazelwood's action. It did not consider there to be any mitigating factors at this stage (which is not concerned with personal mitigation), but did find the following aggravating factors:

- a serious breach of trust;
- abuse of professional position;
- conduct sustained and repeated over a period of time;
- elements of the conduct were premeditated, sophisticated and involved pre-planning, including creating orders and going back into the system to delete records of those items.

49. In all the circumstances, the Committee was satisfied that Ms Hazelwood's conduct fell far below the standard expected of a registered veterinary nurse. Her actions would be considered deplorable by other members of the profession and the public at large and amounted to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

Sanction

50. Miss Curtis informed the Committee that Ms Hazelwood has no previous disciplinary matters recorded against her.

51. In her email dated 26 April 2022, Ms Hazelwood said:

"I fully acknowledge the actions I took were dishonest and below rcvs standards and the severity of it has hit home harshly. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] I have provided character statements which I hope will be taken into consideration and the character statement from Jodie does highlight how out of character the actions I took were. I do not have a large network of friends but the ones that have been there for me have been a solid support for me and they understand the stresses and factors affecting the last 12 months. I am working hard to put my life on track again. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

I really hope that the factors listed in my original email / letter are taken into consideration and that the time out of practice is also acknowledged with decisions moving forwards. I want to focus on getting my life back on track [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] (sic)

52. Ms Hazelwood provided testimonials for the Committee to take into account when deciding the appropriate sanction in this case.

The Committee's Determination on Sanction

53. In reaching its decision on sanction, the Committee took into account all the evidence and documents provided, together with the documents and references provided by Ms Hazelwood and all matters of personal mitigation. The Committee also referred to the RCVS Disciplinary Committee Procedure Guidance. The Committee had in mind that the purpose of sanctions was not to punish Ms Hazelwood, but to protect animals, maintain public confidence in the profession and maintain proper standards of conduct and performance. The Committee was also cognisant of the need to ensure that any sanction is proportionate. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor.

54. The Committee first considered any aggravating and mitigating factors in this case. The Committee found the following aggravating factors:

- a serious breach of trust;
- abuse of professional position;
- possible risk of harm to animals in relation to the POM;
- financial gain (albeit limited);

- conduct sustained and repeated over a period of time;
- elements of the conduct were premeditated, sophisticated and involved pre-planning, including creating orders and then going back into the system to delete records of those items.

55. The Committee considered the following mitigating factors:

- no previous disciplinary history;
- a long and unblemished career as a veterinary nurse;
- no actual harm to animals;
- open and frank admissions to the matters alleged both to her employer and to the College;
- significant insight into her conduct and the impact her actions may have had on her colleagues and the wider profession;
- [REDACTED]
- genuine expressions of remorse and apology;
- positive testimonials.

56. In light of the seriousness of the conduct, the Committee did not consider this was an appropriate case to take no further action or for judgement to be postponed.

57. The Committee next considered whether to reprimand or warn Ms Hazelwood about her behaviour. However, the Committee was firmly of the view that such a sanction would not reflect the seriousness of the conduct which led to this hearing. Ms Hazelwood had stolen from her previous employer when in a position of trust. The thefts were repeated over a period of time and involved a certain level of sophistication, using knowledge gained when employed by OVG, in an attempt to hide the thefts. Significantly, the thefts included taking Prescription Only Medicine, which was a more egregious professional decision that she made. The Committee was of the view that public confidence in the profession, and the College as its regulator, would be seriously undermined if such behaviour were dealt with by either a reprimand or a warning.

58. The Committee then considered whether to suspend Ms Hazelwood. The College's guidance states that suspension may be appropriate where some or all of the following apply:

- (a) the misconduct is serious, but a lesser sanction is inappropriate;
- (b) the Respondent veterinary nurse has insight into the seriousness of the misconduct and there is no significant risk of repeat behaviour;

(c) the Respondent veterinary nurse is fit to return to practice (after the period of suspension).

59. The Committee noted the mitigating factors in this case and that Ms Hazelwood stole these items at a time when she was under particular financial and personal pressure. She said it was out of character and her testimonials supported this assertion. The amounts involved were small and had been repaid. Furthermore, it was apparent that at the time Ms Hazelwood was struggling financially and her motivation was not so much financial gain but rather the need to feed and protect her animals. It was unfortunate that Ms Hazelwood had not attended this hearing, but in her written submissions she had, in the Committee's view, demonstrated significant insight. Her writing came from the heart, she clearly recognised what a dreadful thing she had done and provided genuine expressions of apology and remorse. The Panel noted that Ms Hazelwood had worked as a veterinary nurse for some 16 years without incident. Her testimonials describe her as a very experienced and competent nurse, with an excellent work ethic and a real passion for the animals in her care. One testimonial from a Veterinary Surgeon concluded by saying:

“Steph has always been a very conscientious nurse and her poor decisions in this case are extremely out of character. I know that she now appreciates the seriousness of her actions, and I have every faith she will not be involved in such a mistake again if she is allowed to return to nursing, which I truly hope will be the case given her previously spotless record. I for one would be delighted to work with her again, and I am confident others feel the same way.”

60. Whilst her disgraceful conduct was extremely serious, the Committee was of the view that, given the extensive mitigation, it would be unduly punitive to direct the Registrar to remove her from the Register. In light of the mitigation, the Committee considered the factors referred to above, indicating where suspension may be appropriate, were all present in this case.

61. The Committee therefore decided to make a Suspension Order. The Committee considered a period of suspension to mark the behaviour was both appropriate and proportionate in all the circumstances. The Order will be for a period of 3 months to reflect the seriousness of Ms Hazelwood's disgraceful conduct, whilst reflecting the significant mitigation referred to above. In light of the insight she has shown, the Committee was satisfied that it was highly unlikely Ms Hazelwood would ever behave in this way again and that she would be fit to return to practice after the period of suspension. The Committee considered it would be wrong to deprive the profession of an otherwise competent veterinary nurse and that a member of the public in full

possession of all the facts would not have their confidence in the profession undermined by such a decision.

62. The Committee therefore directs the Registrar to suspend Ms Hazelwood's registration for a period of 3 months.

DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE
23 AUGUST 2022