

ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

INQUIRY RE:

**MRS D, RVN**

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**COMPLETE DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE**

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1. Application for Anonymity

1.1 At the outset of the hearing the Respondent, who was unrepresented, applied to the Committee for a direction that would prevent public disclosure of any information which would enable a member of the public to identify herself, the employer for whom she had worked at the time of the events which gave rise to the Charges, and her children [on grounds which included matters relating to her health and family circumstances]. [REDACTED]

1.2 The College, represented by Mr Peter Mant, counsel, instructed by Capsticks, solicitors, adopted a neutral stance in relation to this application.

1.3 The Committee decided to allow the Respondent's application. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Committee's reasons for allowing the application are set out in full at Annex 1 of this Determination. That determination contains extensive reference to the Respondent's health and the Committee directs that any reference to the nature and detail of the Respondent's

health condition, whether in this determination or in Annex 1, is to be treated as private information and is to be redacted from the public record.

## 2. The Charges

### 2.1 The Respondent faced the following Charges:

*That, being registered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses, between February 2018 and February 2023:*

1. *You posted Tweets that included the statements listed in Schedules 1 and 2 from an account with the user name [REDACTED]*
2. *In the Tweets listed in Schedule 1:*
  - a. *At paragraphs 3-7 and 9-12, you falsely stated or implied that you were a veterinary surgeon*
  - b. *At paragraphs 9,10 and 12, whilst holding yourself out as a veterinary surgeon, you used language that was offensive and/or unprofessional;*
3. *In the Tweets listed in Schedule 2, you made statements that were:*
  - a. *Offensive; and/or*
  - b. *Discriminatory; and/or*
  - c. *Brought the veterinary profession and/or veterinary nursing profession into disrepute (in particular given that you stated or implied that you were a veterinary surgeon and/or a veterinary nurse in Tweets from the same account as listed in Schedule 1)*

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

### 2.2 Schedules 1 and 2 are set out in full at Annex 2 of this Determination.

## 3. Admissions

### 3.1 The Respondent admitted the factual element of the Charges in full, and further admitted that she had been guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

## 4. Background

- 4.1 Mr Mant outlined the factual background to the Committee. The Respondent had posted a number of tweets from an account with a particular username. The tweets were posted between 2018 and 2023. In some tweets she stated that she was a veterinary nurse and in other tweets she falsely stated, or implied, that she was a veterinary surgeon. In this connection she used language that was offensive and unprofessional.
- 4.2 28 tweets posted by the Respondent were offensive and discriminatory. These tweets had been posted between June 2020 and March 2023. They included the use of offensive terms and/or dehumanising language to describe immigrants and other ethnic groups, for example “grimmigrants” or “feral”, and stated or implied that immigrants and other ethnic or religious groups are violent and/or criminal and/or lazy and/or unclean.
- 4.3 Mr Mant referred the Committee to the agreed witness statement of Mr Christopher Murdoch which exhibited the various tweets.
- 4.4 The Committee accepted the Respondent’s admissions to the factual elements of the Charges and found the facts Proved by way of admission.
5. Disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.
- 5.1 In his written submissions, Mr Mant referred the Committee to Paragraph 6.5 of the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses which states:
- “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”.*
- 5.2 He also referred the Committee to supporting guidance on social media in place in February 2018 which states:
- “28.3 Veterinary surgeons may put their registration at risk if they demonstrate inappropriate behaviour when using social media. The standards expected of veterinary surgeons in the real world are no different to the standards they should*

*apply online and veterinary surgeons must uphold the reputation of the veterinary profession at all times.*

*28.7 When using social media veterinary surgeons should avoid making, posting or facilitating statements.... that*

*b. cause undue distress or....*

*c. are offensive, false, inaccurate or unjustified....*

*e. discriminate against an individual based on his or her race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or beliefs or national origin (comments demonstrating hostility towards an individual's race, disability, sexual orientation, religion or transgender identity may amount to a "hate crime" and may be reported to the authorities and prosecuted in a criminal court)*

*f. bring the veterinary profession into disrepute.....*

*28.13 Veterinary nurses should also follow the above guidance when using social media".*

- 5.3 Mr Mant referred the Committee to *R (Ngole) v University of Sheffield* [2019] EWCA Civ. 1127 in which the Court had emphasised that the maintenance of confidence in the profession was a legitimate aim of professional regulation and that, while professional obligations could not extend to prohibiting any statement that was controversial or with political or moral overtones they must extend so far as to seek to ensure that reasonable service users of all kinds perceive they will be treated with dignity and without discrimination [106].
- 5.4 Mr Mant submitted that the Tweets contained in the Schedules were such as to undermine public confidence in the profession.
- 5.5 The Respondent made no further submissions in respect of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.
- 5.6 The Legal Assessor reminded the Committee that the question of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect was a matter for its judgment and that no burden or standard of proof was to be applied.
- 5.7. The Committee identified a number of aggravating factors in the Tweets which formed the basis of the Charges. The Respondent had falsely identified herself as a

veterinary surgeon and this gave rise to questions of dishonesty, lack of probity and integrity. Her conduct had been premeditated, occurred over a lengthy period of time, involved an abuse of her professional position and demonstrated discriminatory behaviour. A large number of the Tweets were highly offensive towards various minority groups.

5.8 In written communications to the College, the Respondent referred to a number of personal difficulties in her life which, she said, had distorted her outlook and also referred to the insidious influence of social media and its algorithms. She felt that she had become isolated and bitter during the period in question which included a number of Covid lockdowns. She did not seek to suggest that these factors excused her behaviour.

5.9 The Committee concluded that the Respondent's behaviour fell far short of the standards to be expected of a registered veterinary nurse. There were two distinct strands to her misconduct, both of which were serious. One involved the false statements, on a public platform, that she was a veterinary surgeon and the other concerned the highly offensive language directed at minority groups. Both of these strands were liable to undermine confidence in the profession and, in the Committee's assessment, amounted to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

## 6. Sanction

6.1 Mr Mant confirmed that there were no previous regulatory findings against the Respondent.

6.2 The Respondent said that she would respect any decision which the Committee made.

6.3 The Legal Assessor reminded the Committee of the principles to be found in the Sanctions Guidance and of the overarching need to arrive at a proportionate outcome to the case, having regard to the Committee's responsibility to maintain

proper standards of behaviour from those on the register and public confidence in the profession.

- 6.4 The Committee had regard to the principles contained in the Sanctions Guidance.
- 6.5 The Respondent had submitted a bundle of documents which included her perception of the circumstances surrounding her behaviour and a supportive reference from a friend.
- 6.6 The Committee has previously identified a number of aggravating factors when considering the issue of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect and it is not necessary to repeat those factors here.
- 6.7 In relation to mitigating factors, the Respondent had had a long and previously unblemished career of some 15 years and had made early admissions, although, when first confronted about the Tweets she had denied responsibility and deleted the account. She has expressed considerable remorse.
- 6.8 The Committee noted the character reference produced by a friend of the Respondent and also the help and support that she is now receiving in relation to her health. The Committee was prepared to accept that feelings of isolation and the insidious consequences of social media may have played some contributory part in the Respondent's behaviour but such factors cannot conceivably excuse the Respondent's decision to pretend to be a veterinary surgeon and to tweet in the way described in Schedule 2 over a period of years.
- 6.9 The Committee considered sanction in ascending order.
- 6.10 The case was much too serious for the Committee to take no further action.
- 6.11 The Committee did not consider that any useful purpose would be served by postponing sanction.

- 6.12 The Committee next considered whether a reprimand or warning would be sufficient. It concluded that this sanction would be insufficient to meet the public interest.
- 6.13 The Committee moved on to consider whether a period of suspension would be a proportionate outcome to the case. Paragraph 68 of the Sanctions Guidance states:
- “Suspension may be appropriate where the misconduct is sufficiently serious to warrant more than a reprimand but not sufficiently serious to justify removal from the register.”*
- 6.14 In the Committee’s judgment the Respondent’s misconduct was sufficiently serious to justify removal from the register. For a registered veterinary nurse to pretend to be a veterinary surgeon on a public platform is itself an extremely serious matter. When that presentation is associated with the highly offensive language of the tweets in this case, extending over a period of years, the conduct is in the view of the Committee fundamentally incompatible with continued registration.
- 6.15 The Committee has concluded that removal from the register is the only sanction which is sufficient to satisfy the public interest in maintaining proper standards of behaviour for registered veterinary practitioners and public confidence in the profession and its regulation.
- 6.16 The Committee therefore directs that the Respondent’s name is removed from the register of veterinary nurses.

**Disciplinary Committee**  
**19 March 2024**