

**ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS  
INQUIRY RE:**

**CHELSEA JADE STRANGWAY RVN**

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**DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE ON THE FACTS AND DISGRACEFUL  
CONDUCT IN A PROFESSIONAL RESPECT**

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The Respondent, Chelsea Jade Strangway RVN, appeared before the Disciplinary Committee to answer the following Charges:

*That, being registered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses, and whilst in practice at the Pet Vet, 25-29, Balby Road, Doncaster, DN4 0RD ("the practice") you:*

- (1) On or around 20 July 2020 stated on the hospitalisation record for Miranda Highfield that you had attended the practice to monitor Miranda at 3.00 am on 21 July 2020 when this was not the case;*
- (2) On or around 2 September 2020 stated on the hospitalisation record for Bacon Rockwell that you had attended the practice to monitor Bacon and/or administered co-amoxiclav and paracetamol at 10.00pm on 2 September 2020 and 4.00am on 3 September 2020 when this was not the case;*
- (3) On or around 11 September 2020 stated on the hospitalisation record for Duke Johnson that you had attended the practice to monitor Duke at 11.00pm on 11 September 2020 and 4.00am on 12 September 2020 when this was not the case;*
- (4) On or around 23 September 2020 stated on the hospitalisation record for Oscar Hardy that you had attended the practice to monitor Oscar and/or administered co-amoxiclav and buprenorphine at 2.00am on 24 September 2020 when this was not the case;*
- (5) On or around 27 September 2020 stated on the hospitalisation record for Porsha Mackell that you had attended the practice to monitor Porsha at 5.00am on 28 September 2020 when this was not the case;*

*(6) Between 1 January 2020 and 10 February 2020 whilst not being on the Register of Veterinary Nurses,*

- a. held yourself out as a registered veterinary nurse despite not being entitled to do so; and*
- b. practised as a registered veterinary nurse despite not being entitled to do so.*

*(7) Your conduct in relation to (1) – (5) and (6)(a) was:*

- c. dishonest; and/or*
- d. misleading;*

*(8) Your conduct in relation to (1) – (6) was potentially detrimental to 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.*

1. The Respondent is a Registered Veterinary Nurse, who first registered with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (the College) as a veterinary nurse on 14 October 2016.
2. At the outset of the hearing, the Respondent, who was unrepresented, admitted all charges 1-6, and admitted charge 7, in that she admitted that her conduct in relation to (1)-(5) and 6 (a) was dishonest. She also admitted charge 8. She also admitted that, in relation to the charges, she was guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.
3. The Committee was informed by the Legal Assessor, Richard Price KC, that a Case Management Meeting was held on 15 September 2022, which was attended by the Respondent, Peter Lownds (counsel for the College), the DC Clerk and himself. At the meeting, the Legal Assessor ascertained that the Respondent understood the meaning of the charges, understood the three-stage procedure that would be followed at the hearing, and what the possible consequences might be if the charges were found proved. The Respondent said that she understood everything she had been told. She indicated that it was her intention to admit all the charges, including dishonesty, and said that she accepted all the evidence against her contained in the Inquiry Bundle. The Respondent informed those present that she no longer worked within the veterinary profession, and she would only be able to attend the hearing on Tuesday morning, 20 September, and thereafter on subsequent days between 12.00 and 01pm. She would be content for the hearing to proceed in her absence, if she did not attend.
4. On Tuesday 20 September 2022, at a meeting attended by the Respondent, counsel for the College, the DC Clerk and the Legal Assessor, the Respondent confirmed that she intended to admit all the charges. She also said that she understood what was meant by Disgraceful Conduct in a Professional Respect, and would admit, in relation to the charges, she was guilty of Disgraceful Conduct.
5. The Committee wished to hear submissions from counsel for the College, as to the background facts relevant to the charges, so as to be satisfied that the Respondent's admissions were properly made.

## **The background facts relevant to the charges – the College’s case**

6. The College relied upon the following witness evidence:
- (a) Donna Johnson, at the time Clinical Services Manager at the Practice (“DJ”)
  - (b) Francesca Corridan, at the time Senior Veterinary Nurse at the Practice (“FC”)
  - (c) Iuliana Condrea, Senior Veterinary Surgeon at the Practice (“IC”)
  - (d) Shane Cahill, Veterinary Surgeon at the Practice (“SC”)
  - (e) Rebecca Castanon, Veterinary Surgeon at the Practice (“RG”)
  - (f) Loran Simpson, Veterinary Surgeon at the Practice (“LS”)
  - (g) Nicola South, Customer Experience Manager and Head of Registration at the College (“NS”).

All the above witnesses had produced witness statements that were in the Inquiry Bundle.

7. At all material times the Respondent was employed as a Registered Veterinary Nurse in practice at the Pet Vet, 25-29 Balby Road, Doncaster, DN4 0RD (“the Practice”). The Respondent started work on 6 January 2020. She resigned with immediate effect on 30 September 2020.
8. In summary, the charges concerned the Respondent’s falsification of clinical records to indicate that on five separate occasions she had attended to patients out of hours when she had not done so; and that additionally, for a period of over a month she held herself out and worked as a Registered Veterinary Nurse when she was not on the Register for veterinary nurses.
9. At the practice sometimes patients were required to stay overnight. Clients were charged for this service and told that a nurse would check their animal twice throughout the night and be provided with required care at the designated times. When the overnight nursing checks were made, the hospitalisation sheet for the relevant patient would be updated to record readings taken at the time of the inspection and to indicate if medication was given at a particular time. The recordings made would inform the planning of care and treatment of the patient concerned and there was an obvious expectation that the records kept were accurate.
10. A staff night shift rota was operated. The out of hours checks would typically take place at 11.00 pm and 3.00 am. The nursing staff had a contractual requirement to take part in the out of hours rota system. The Respondent covered shifts on the rota.
11. The management at the practice received information suggesting that some staff were bringing non-staff members into the practice when they conducted the out of hours checks and told staff that this practice must stop.

## **Examination of CCTV and initial discovery of non-attendance**

12. On 28 September 2020 DJ and FC conducted a spot check and viewed the CCTV footage from inside the practice where the overnight animals were kept for the previous night when the Respondent had been on out of hours rota duty. It was established that the timing on the CCTV was accurate to within 3 mins.

#### Charge 5

13. The overnight patient was a dog called Porsha Mackell who as recovering from a C-section and spay operation. The footage showed that the Respondent had made a check at around 8pm and a further check at around 10.45 pm on 27 September 2020. There was no evidence on the CCTV that she came back into the practice after leaving shortly before 11.00 pm.

14. On the hospitalisation form completed by Respondent for Porsha she had made a record concerning an attendance upon her by her at 5 am on 28 September 2020.

15. Later in the day on 28 September 2020 DJ and FC held a meeting with the Respondent. The Respondent confirmed that she had attended upon the patient at 3.30 am. She was shown the CCTV evidence and maintained that she had attended, and that the CCTV must be wrong. The Respondent subsequently sent an email during the evening confirming that she had not attended and stating that she had filled in the 5am entry in the notes by mistake.

16. The practice kept its CCTV records for a month and FC subsequently reviewed the CCTV for the Respondent's other night duties over the previous month.

#### Charge 2

17. A dog patient Bacon Rockwell was being treated at the practice for mastitis and was kept overnight on 2 September 2020 for monitoring of her temperature and mammary glands. The Respondent was the overnight nurse on duty. She completed a hospitalisation form recording that she attended at 10 pm and 4 am. The form recorded that she administered co-amoxiclav and paracetamol on her 4 am recorded visit.

18. The CCTV showed the Respondent attended between 10.21 and 10.50pm and not again until 7.22am. Therefore, she could not have administered the treatment at 4:00am.

#### Charge 3

19. A cat called Duke Johnson was kept in overnight on 11 September as he was unwell and dehydrated and needed re-hydration prior to further tests planned for the following day. The Respondent was the overnight nurse on duty. She completed a hospitalisation form recording that she conducted checks at 11 pm and 4 am.

20. The CCTV showed that the Respondent attended between 9.50 and 10.00 pm and did not return for the rest of the night.

#### Charge 4

21. A dog called Oscar Hardy was admitted overnight on 23 September 2020. He had gastrointestinal symptoms and a concern about neurological issues. He was dehydrated and required overnight rehydration.
22. The Respondent was the nurse on out of hours duty. She completed a hospitalisation form recording that she visited the patient and administered co-amoxiclav and buprenorphine at 2 am on 24 September 2020.
23. The CCTV showed that she attended at 9.59pm and left at 10.01 pm and did not subsequently return. Therefore, the dog did not receive the prescribed treatment as recorded.
24. When Vet IC checked on Oscar at 8 am on 23 September 2020 she discovered that the IV fluid line to rehydrate him had 'blown' at some point overnight. This meant the fluids were running under his skin rather than intravenously.

#### Examination of alarm system records

25. The practice had a two-zone alarm system. One zone covered an upstairs flat and the other the ground floor where the patients stayed. It was possible to set the alarm for the ground floor zone and leave the first-floor zone unset but not the other way around. Consequently, if the alarm was set the ground floor would always be alarmed.

#### Charges 2-5

26. DJ obtained the alarm records. The relevant records confirmed what the CCTV footage showed, which was that the Respondent could not have checked on the patients as she had recorded on 3 September (Charge 2), 12 September (Charge 3), 24 September (Charge 4) and 28 September 2020 (Charge 5).

#### Charge 1

27. DJ subsequently examined the alarm records for a longer period and identified a further night on which the Respondent failed to conduct an out of hours check on a patient.
28. A cat called 'Miranda' Highfield was kept overnight on 20 July 2020 as she had eating difficulties and diarrhoea and required fluid therapy and further examination. The Respondent was the overnight nurse on duty. She completed a hospitalisation form recording that she attended upon the patient at 10.30 pm and 3 am. The alarm data records showed that the alarm was set from 12.14am until 7.23am without interruption. The Respondent could not therefore have been in the practice for 3am check as she has recorded.

### Practising as a Registered Veterinary Nurse whilst not on the Register

29. On 4 October, the Respondent was emailed the Registered Veterinary Nurse Annual Fee Renewal Notice for the 2019-20 period. Page 6 of the notice stated as follows: "If your payment is not received in full before January 2020, your name will be removed from the Register, you will need to cease all Schedule 3 work immediately and you will not be able to use the postnominal 'RVN'".
30. She was subsequently sent multiple email, text, and letter reminders. No communication was received from her in any of the communications relating to the 2019-20 renewal and she did not complete the renewal process.
31. The Respondent was removed from the Register of Veterinary Nurses on 1 January 2020 for non-payment. She was notified of this on 2 January 2020 by email.
32. She remained off the Register until she applied to be restored to it on 10 February 2020. She did not update her contact details when applying for restoration and confirmed that the historical details to which the earlier communications had been sent were accurate.
33. The Practice had no knowledge of the fact that she was not on the Register for this period until after the Respondent had resigned and left the Practice.
34. The Respondent had started work with the Practice on 6 January 2020. She was recruited as Registered Veterinary Nurse and part of her job involved undertaking Schedule 3 tasks. In her CV that was submitted in the recruitment process she is described as a Registered Veterinary Nurse.
35. After starting work the Respondent completed and signed an induction form on 13 January 2020 stating that she was a Registered Veterinary Nurse. At the time she signed the form she was not on the Register of Veterinary Nurses.
36. During the period that the Respondent was not on the Register she performed a variety of Schedule 3 procedures, including vaccinations, maintaining general anaesthesia, administering medical treatment and dentistry. Schedule 3 procedures are procedures that can only be carried out by an RVN. At no point during this period or subsequently did she inform the Practice of the position.

### Dishonest and/or misleading behaviour

37. Regarding allegations 1-5 inclusive, the Respondent deliberately created what she knew to be false records untruthfully recording that she had attended and conducted observations at a particular time on patients when in fact she had not. On two of the five occasions she also knowingly untruthfully recorded she had administered medication

when she had not. It was submitted that her conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

38. Regarding allegation 6, the Respondent was repeatedly informed of the deadline of 1 January 2020 for the renewal of her RVN registration and the fact that if she failed to renew her name by this date she would be removed from the register, must cease representing herself as a Registered Veterinary Nurse and cease all schedule 3 work immediately. Nonetheless, she continued to both hold herself as a RVN nurse and practiced as a RVN beyond this date and for a period of about five weeks. It is submitted her conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

#### Conduct potentially detrimental to animal welfare

39. The reliability and accuracy of a patient's medical notes is plainly extremely important in both informing their immediate ongoing care and treatment and in managing and treating their health in the future. By falsely recording observations that did not in fact take place and that medication was given, the Respondent provided materially misleading information that could have potentially been detrimental to the health of the animals concerned.
40. Additionally, the primary purpose of attending to monitor a patient during the night is to check on the well-being of the animal concerned. In the case of Oscar Hardy (Charge 4) it was discovered that his IV fluid administration device needed repositioning at some point overnight. The Respondent's false record meant that it would have been concluded that the incident must have taken place after her 2 am visit, when in fact the incident could have taken place at any point after 10.01pm. The failure to conduct the night-time monitoring checks plainly had the potential to be detrimental to the animals concerned.

#### History of correspondence

41. In correspondence between the College and the Respondent concerning these proceedings the Respondent has provided the following two material responses:
- (a) On 16 December 2020 she stated that she was struggling with health issues over the relevant period and had concerns about her security when covering night shifts at the Practice. She also stated that she had always informed vets at the Practice concerning her night duties "*regarding times etc and pushing times back*" and that she "*would never put an animal in any danger regarding medication if given slightly different time this was always told to the veterinary surgeon.*"
- (b) On 10 May 2022 she stated that she wished to apologise and repeated that she had health issues and personal security fears at the relevant time. She stated that she had not renewed her RVN registration due to oversight "*as I wasn't in a financial situation to*

*pay the fee at that point and if I recall I messaged the finance team in relation to this and again apologise.”*

42. In relation to the matters raised by the Respondent in her communications, the response from witnesses at the Practice is as follows:
- (a) The Registrant was allocated a similar number of out of hours duties as other veterinary nursing staff and additionally volunteered for extra duties.
  - (b) The Practice was sympathetic and supportive to health issues raised by the Registrant.
  - (c) There were break-ins at the Practice in May 2020. Appropriate short-term and long-term security measures was taken to protect the premises and staff.
  - (d) There is no record or evidence from the veterinary surgeons at the Practice of the Registrant supporting the Respondent’s claim that she informed them of changes to the timing of her night visits to conduct observations on the five animals concerned or to provide them with night medication.

### **The Decision of the Disciplinary Committee as to the Facts**

43. The Committee had read and considered all the evidence in the Inquiry Bundle. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor that the burden is on the College to prove the allegations of fact set out in the charges, and that the standard of proof is so that the Committee is sure that the relevant facts have been proved.
44. The Committee notes that the Respondent has admitted all the charges.
45. The Committee accepts that the background facts summarised by counsel for the College, as set out above, are accurate.
46. The Committee accepts that the charges concern the Respondent’s falsification of clinical records to indicate that on five separate occasions she had attended to patients out of hours, when she had not done so; and that for a period of over a month she held herself out and worked as a Registered Veterinary Nurse, when she was not on the Register for veterinary nurses.
47. The investigation in this case started because the Practice received information that suggested that some staff were bringing non-staff members into the Practice when they conducted out-of-hours checks, and told staff that this practice must stop.

### The individual charges

#### Charge 1



48. This charge relates to a cat called 'Miranda' Highfield. The Respondent completed a hospitalisation form recording that she attended upon the patient at 10:30 PM and 3 AM on 20 July 2020. The alarm data records show the alarm set from 12:14 AM until 7:23 AM on 20 July 2020 without interruption. The Respondent could not therefore have been in the practice for a 3 a.m. check, as recorded by the Respondent. The Committee is sure that charge 1 is proved on the basis of the reliable alarm data records referred to above.

#### Charge 2

49. Charge 2 related to a dog, 'Bacon' Rockwell. The Respondent had completed a hospitalisation form recording that she attended at 10pm on 2 September and 4am on 3 September and administered medication on her for a recorded visit. CCTV showed that the Respondent attended this between 10:21 and 10:50pm and not again until 7:22am.

#### Charge 3

50. Charge 3 related to a cat, 'Duke' Johnson. The Respondent had completed a hospitalisation form recording that she conducted checks at 11pm on 11 September and 4am on 12 September. CCTV showed that the Respondent attended between 9:50pm and 10pm and did not return for the rest of the night.

#### Charge 4

51. Charge 4 related to a dog, Oscar Hardy. The Respondent completed a hospitalisation form recording that she visited the patient and administered medication at 2 am on 24 September. CCTV showed that the Respondent attended at 9:59pm and left at 10:01pm on 23 September, and did not subsequently return until the following morning.

#### Charge 5

52. This related to a dog called 'Porsha' Mackell. CCTV footage disclosed that the Respondent checked the dog at 8pm and 10.45pm on 27 September 2020, but left the Practice at about 11pm, and did not return that night. The Respondent recorded on the hospital form that she had recorded an attendance by her at 5am. When challenged later, the Respondent initially said that she attended at 3.30am, but in the evening admitted she had not attended, and had entered the 5am entry by mistake.

53. With regard to charges 2, 3, 4 and 5 the Committee noted that the Practice had a two-zone alarm system. One zone governed the upstairs flat and the other the ground floor where the patients were hospitalised. It was possible to set the alarm for the ground floor zone and leave the first-floor zone unset, but not the other way round. Consequently, if the alarm was set the ground floor would always be alarmed.

54. DJ obtained the alarm records, are exhibited in the Inquiry Bundle. The relevant records confirmed what the CCTV footage showed, namely that the Respondent could not have checked on the patients as she had recorded on 12, 24 and 28 September 2020. The Committee considers that the alarm records provide clear evidence that the Respondent falsified the records alleged in charges 2,3,4 and 5. Coupled with the CCTV evidence which the Respondent has admitted, the Committee is sure that charges 2,3,4 and 5 are proved.

#### Charge 6 (a) and (b) - practising as a veterinary nurse whilst not on the register

55. This charge relates to the period between 1 January 2020 and 10 February 2020 when the Respondent was not on the Register of Veterinary Nurses. The evidence in support of these allegations comes from NS, the Customer Experience Manager and Head of Registration at the College. Her evidence is set out in her witness statement and the exhibits thereto, and is summarised above. This witness's evidence is supported entirely by contemporaneous documentation, which the Committee considers to be entirely credible and reliable. The Respondent has admitted these allegations of fact. In the circumstances, the Committee is sure that these allegations have been proved.

#### Charge 7

56. The Committee is familiar with the appropriate test for dishonesty in regulatory proceedings, set out in the case of *Ivey v Genting Casinos (2017)*. The Legal Assessor has advised, in accordance with this case, that the committee must:-

- (i) first ascertain (subjectively) the actual state of the individual's knowledge or belief as to the facts;
- (ii) when his state of mind as to knowledge or belief as to facts is established, the question whether his conduct was honest or dishonest is to be determined by the fact-finder by applying the (objective) standards of ordinary decent people.

57. Counsel for the College has submitted that, regarding allegations 1 to 5 inclusive, the Respondent deliberately created what she knew to be false records, and untruthfully recorded that she had attended and conducted observations at a particular time. On two of the five occasions she also knowingly untruthfully recorded she had administered medication when she had not. He submitted that her conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.

58. The Committee considers that the Respondent must have known at the relevant time that what she was doing by falsifying the records was dishonest. She has admitted as much. The Committee is satisfied that her conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The Committee accepts the submissions of Counsel for the College in this regard. The Committee is satisfied so that it is sure that the Respondent was acting dishonestly in relation to allegations (1) – (5). The Committee does not consider it necessary to consider whether or not the Respondent's conduct was misleading.

59. Regarding allegation 6(a), Counsel for the College submitted that the Respondent was repeatedly informed of the deadline of 1 January 2020 for the renewal of her RVN registration, and the fact that if she failed to renew by this date she would be removed from the Register, must cease representing herself as a Registered Veterinary Nurse and cease all Schedule 3 work immediately. Nonetheless, she continued to hold herself out as a RVN and practised as a RVN beyond this date and for a period of about five weeks. He submits that her conduct was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people.
60. Although the Respondent admitted this allegation at the start of the hearing, when she was giving evidence on affirmation at the conclusion of the submissions of counsel for the College, she appeared to be saying that she was not sure that what she was doing in relation to allegation 6(a) was dishonest, but was more an oversight on her part. However, counsel for the College submitted that this was not a tenable explanation having regard to the repeated reminders that she received from the College, and her previous knowledge of the need to pay an annual fee from having been an RVN some five years.
61. The Committee considered that the Respondent must have realised at the time that what she was doing was dishonest, for the reasons set out by counsel for the College, and that her conduct in holding herself out as a Registered Veterinary Nurse despite not being entitled to do so amounted to conduct that was dishonest by the standards of ordinary decent people. The Committee accepted the submissions of counsel for the College in this regard. The Committee is satisfied so that it is sure that the Respondent was acting dishonestly in relation to allegation 6(a).

#### Charge 8

62. Counsel for the College submitted that the reliability and accuracy of a patient's medical notes is plainly extremely important in both informing their immediate ongoing care and treatment, and in managing and treating their health in the future. By falsely recording observations that did not in fact take place and that medication was given, the Respondent provided materially misleading information that could have potentially been detrimental to the health and welfare of the animals concerned. The Committee agrees with this submission, and is satisfied so that it is sure that this charge is proved.

**DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE**  
**ON DISGRACEFUL CONDUCT IN A PROFESSIONAL RESPECT**

63. The Committee has found the factual allegations proved. It is now for the committee to consider whether the Respondent's behaviour constitutes disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.
64. The Committee has accepted the advice of the Legal Assessor that Disgraceful Conduct in a Professional Respect means conduct which falls far short of that to be expected from a reasonably competent Registered Veterinary Nurse.
65. The Committee considered the relevant aggravating and mitigating factors that are relevant at this stage of the hearing. The Committee considered that the following aggravating factors are relevant:
- Risk of injury to an animal
  - Dishonesty, lack of probity or integrity
  - Misconduct sustained or repeated over a period of time
  - Actual or potential financial gain
  - Any relevant increased position of trust or responsibility
66. The Committee considered that mitigating factors included:
- No actual harm to an animal
  - Open and frank admissions at an early stage, and admissions to all of the allegations at the outset of the hearing.
67. Counsel for the College submitted that the Respondent's conduct as found proved, involving dishonesty and conduct potentially detrimental to animal welfare, is plainly conduct that falls far short of that which is to be expected from a reasonably competent Registered Veterinary Nurse.
68. He also submitted that the Respondent's conduct conflicted with the required fundamental principle under the Code of Conduct for Veterinary Nurses to act within honesty and integrity.
69. He submitted that her conduct failed to meet the following professional responsibility requirements under the Code:
- To make animal health and welfare your first consideration when attending to animals
  - To provide veterinary nursing care that is appropriate and adequate
  - When supplying and administering medicines you must do so responsibly
  - To keep clear, accurate and detailed clinical and client records
  - Do not hold yourself out as having expertise you cannot substantiate
  - To be entered in the Register of Veterinary Nurses.

70. This is a matter for the judgement of the Committee.

71. This is a case of admitted dishonesty, and involves misconduct sustained or repeated over a period of time. The Respondent's misconduct created the risk of injury to animals in her care. The Committee, in its judgement, considers that this is a clear case where the admitted conduct of the Respondent falls far short of that to be expected from a reasonably competent Registered Veterinary Nurse.

**Disciplinary Committee**

**21 September 2022**