

## Frozen lolly

### Retention fees held for 2010-11 and online payments soon

*"We appreciate that the current economic climate is challenging."*

It's been a tough year financially for many and, in general, things don't look set to improve any time soon. Veterinary practices are no doubt feeling the strain, and in recognition of this, RCVS Council has agreed a budget for 2010 that does not require registration or retention fees for veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses to be increased.

"We appreciate that the current economic climate is challenging and have worked hard to ensure we can meet the objectives of our business plan for next year without needing to increase income gained from members' and nurses' fees," commented Dr Jerry Davies, Treasurer.

A small increase of 2% will be made on registration and annual fees for the Practice Standards Scheme, making the 2010 registration fee £454, and the annual fee £245 for a main practice/standalone premises and £56 for a branch.

We are in the process of removing almost 700 members from the Register for the non-payment of retention fees (see page 5). Soon, the process of paying fees, or updating your address details, will be easier. We will be working hard over the summer to introduce new database software which will enable us to manage your information in a more effective manner. This will mean we can offer more online services to members and VNs via a new website.

The redevelopment of our website will include a design make-over and an overhaul of the content, adding a lot more interactive areas to the site and making it easier to find the things you want. Soon, the frustrated cries of "why can't I do that online?" should be at an end.

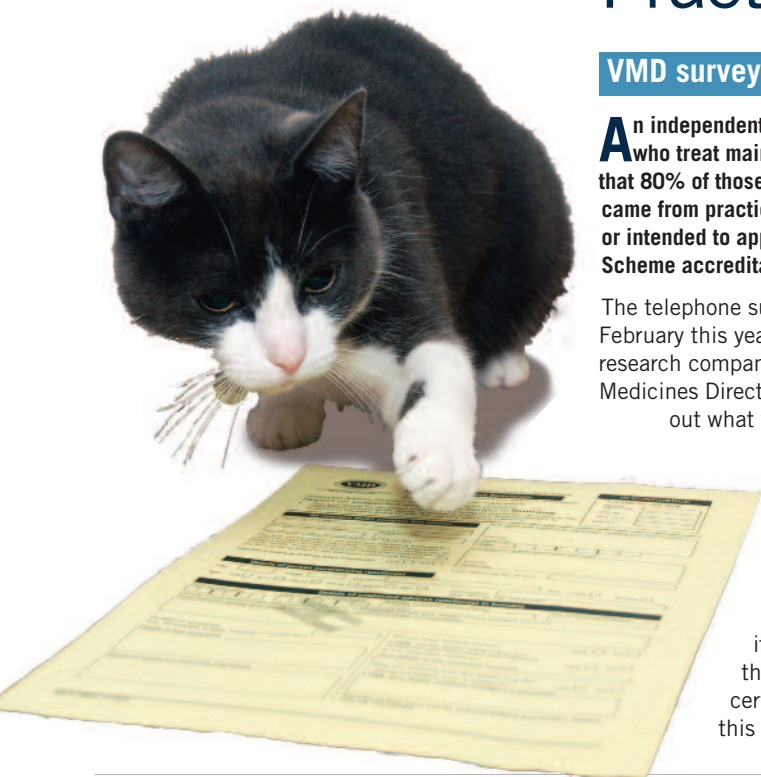
The Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 does place some restrictions on the extent to which we can communicate with members online. However, integration of the new website and database will mean we can put greater control over the accuracy of data and the payment of fees in your hands.

We hope that the new website will be launched in late autumn. Extensive user testing is planned, but if you have any suggestions for content or tools you would like to see on the new site, or things you would like to see changed, please do let us know – your feedback would be much appreciated ([communications@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:communications@rcvs.org.uk)).

**In this issue:** VMD survey, BVA Congress, new faces on Council, cloning warning, Trust support, Share Jones lecture, new Board for FVE, Standards review consultation, legislation priorities, 24/7 discussion, support lines, new Advice Notes, DipAVN, education in Europe, overseas vets, e-portfolios for VNs, future for NVQs, EMS review recommendations, events update, PI Lay Observers' Report, DC hearings, Trust report.



# 8 out of 10 cats prefer Practice Standards



## VMD survey shows high take-up rate of Scheme

**A**n independent research survey of vets who treat mainly cats and dogs has revealed that 80% of those taking part in the survey came from practices that either had applied, or intended to apply for Practice Standards Scheme accreditation.

The telephone survey was carried out in February this year by an independent market research company on behalf of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), and aimed to find out what vets knew about a number of areas relating to veterinary medicines.

The survey found that the online service VMD offers for generating import certificates was highly rated – by those vets that had used it. However, more than half of the vets who applied for import certificates were unaware that this service existed – and, in

particular, that the import certificates generated online are now free.

Responding vets were found also to be largely unaware of the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPCs) which are available as a source of product information through the VMD website. SPCs have been produced for every veterinary medicine with a Marketing Authorisation within the EU, and include all of the information on the labels/leaflets, as well as summary information on the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of the product.

Most vets said they would report suspected adverse drug reactions by sending back the 'yellow form', which VMD said was a good result. However, VMD would also like to encourage vets to report any suspected lack of medicine efficacy.

A copy of the report can be obtained from the VMD website: <http://www.vmd.gov.uk>.

# What exactly is a vet?

## JV-P to give prestigious Wooldridge Lecture

**I**t's not a question that lends itself easily to a short answer, but one that incoming President Professor Sandy Trees is tackling in the prestigious Wooldridge Lecture at the British Veterinary Association Congress in Cardiff this year.

Sandy was asked by BVA President Nicky Paull to speak on this subject since, in addition to serving on the RCVS Officer team, he was until recently Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool. "This, coupled with his experience overseas, makes Sandy ideally placed to discuss what makes vets unique, and the breadth and changing nature of our role," explains Nicky.

"Vets have a wide range of knowledge and skills," says Sandy, "which can and should enable them to make a contribution to many of the wider problems facing our global society."

The theme of the BVA Annual Congress will be 'Together forever?'. Speakers will include former RCVS President, Professor Sheila Crispin, who will give a lecture on Ophthalmology aimed at non-specialist practitioners and recent graduates, and Dilys Morgan, Head, Department for Gastrointestinal,

*"Vets have a wide range of knowledge and skills, which can and should enable them to make a contribution to many of the wider problems facing our global society."*

Emerging and Zoonotic Infections, Health Protection Agency Centre for Infections, who will discuss the implications of the potential removal next year of some of the UK's rights to stricter animal import conditions, through the 'Pet Passport' scheme. Nigel Gibbens, Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO) and RCVS Council Member, will look at animal welfare within a devolved administrations context, together with Christianne Glossop, CVO Wales, Mike Lamont, Acting CVO Scotland, and Bert Houston, CVO Northern Ireland. Congress will run from 24-26 September at the Mecure Holland House Hotel, Cardiff. For more information or to register, please visit [www.bva.co.uk/congress](http://www.bva.co.uk/congress).





# And the decision is...

New faces voted onto both Councils as voter numbers increase



**R**esults for the 2009 RCVS Council and VN Council elections were announced at the beginning of May, and, following slight increases in both turnouts this year, one or two new faces will be joining some of the more familiar ones from July.

#### Results are in

Voting in the RCVS Council election increased from 17% to 18.2%, with 4,041 veterinary surgeons out of a possible 22,201 casting a vote. Existing members Jill Nute, Peter Jinman, Jerry Davies and Bradley Viner held on to their seats, while Chris Gray and Chris Tufnell (pictured, left to right), were voted in for the first time and will officially join Council at RCVS Day on 3 July 2009.

The VN Council elections saw a proportionally larger increase in voters, with 912 out of a possible 8,108 VNs casting a vote. This was an 11.2% turnout, up by nearly 25% on last year. Current Chairman Andrea Jeffery was re-elected and will begin her eighth year on VNC in July (although she will be handing over the Chairman's reins to Liz Branscombe), and will be joined by newcomer Louise Glysen.

"I feel immensely lucky to have been successful, in what turned out to be a close result for the second seat," says Louise. "I am looking forward taking up my position on VN Council, and am honoured to be doing it along

side Andrea, who is an experienced Council Member. Most of all, I was pleased to see an increase in voter numbers this year and, as a new Council Member, I hope to continue this upward trend of VN engagement with VN Council."

#### More engaging

This year, for the first time, the College teamed up with the online community websites [www.vetsurgeon.org](http://www.vetsurgeon.org) and [www.vetnurse.co.uk](http://www.vetnurse.co.uk) in order to allow voters more opportunity to quiz the candidates and find out more about their views.

Over the voting period, the two election sections on these sites received a total of over 23,000 page views. Over 53 different discussion threads (ie questions to candidates) were started, which received a total of over 650 responses.

Registrar Jane Hern comments: "Although this created a lot of extra work for the candidates, we were pleased with the opportunity this presented for more people to get involved and engage directly with them."

#### Thank you and goodbye

At the recent RCVS Council meeting, President Jill Nute paid tribute to retiring Council Members Nigel Swayne and Brian Jennings, and thanked them for their hard work and dedicated service to the profession.

## Contracts in focus

### BVA advice for young vets

**T**he British Veterinary Association (BVA) has launched a campaign to improve the number of recent veterinary graduates who have proper written contracts of employment. It is backed by the RCVS, the Veterinary Practice Managers Association and the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons.

In a survey of its young graduate members, the BVA's Young Vet Network found that only 76% had a contract of employment and that over 40% of recent graduates had been in a job for over six months without a written contract in place.

*"Having proper contracts in place is for the benefit of both employee and employer."*

The BVA hopes to raise awareness about the importance of written contracts, which set out employment rights, responsibilities and duties. Employers have a duty to provide a written statement of their main employment terms within two months of starting work. An information leaflet outlining what should be included in a contract and offering advice will be sent to all veterinary practices in the UK, all BVA members and final-year veterinary students.

President Jill Nute commented: "Having proper contracts in place is for the benefit of both employee and employer, and is certainly something we would support. It's a general legal requirement and something that is checked as part of Practice Standards Scheme inspections, at all levels."

For more information, and to download a copy of the leaflet, visit [www.bva.co.uk/contracts](http://www.bva.co.uk/contracts)



## Cloning around

### Police warning on practice website security

**G**went Police has warned veterinary practices to be alert to the possibility of their websites being cloned for the purposes of illegally obtaining veterinary medicines.

Recently, a practice in Gwent was the victim of one such fraud when its website was cloned by someone as a means of legitimising the attempt to purchase £150,000 worth of a medicine called Agrobolin.

Gwent Police's Pharmacy Officer, Roger Booth, reported that: "The cloned site was created in East Timor and the medicine was to be paid for cash-on-delivery in Singapore. The three contact numbers on the site related to phones in Malaysia and Nigeria."

The police advice for practices includes:



1. Search for your own website to determine if it has been cloned
2. Be aware that as part of this scam staff names were quoted in correspondence when trying to legitimise the claims – you might consider removing names from the home page

3. Beware of offers of discounted products from new sources
4. Contact Trading Standards or the police if you have any suspicions.

## Get a move on for the RCVS Trust

### Limber up for the London 10k

**T**ime has almost run out to claim an RCVS Trust charity place in the British 10k London Run - however, if you are quick you can still squeeze in before starter's orders.

The Trust is challenging its runners to raise £300 each – much needed money which will be used to support veterinary education and fund research projects that impact on animal welfare (for details of some recent projects funded by the Trust see page 23).

Lucy Evans, who works in the Professional Conduct Department, is one of the people taking up the gauntlet. She admits that the prospect is "daunting - I've never run any kind of race in my life before," but as she thinks the Trust is a great charity, she has been persuaded to take part. If £300 sounds like a lot, well how many people are there in your practice? What about relatives and friends? If you can persuade, say, five people to give you £20 each, and another 20 to put in a tenner... that's your £300 raised.

The race starts at 9.35am on Sunday 12 July at Hyde Park Corner, with the course taking runners past most of the London landmarks – although inexplicably missing out Belgravia House – before finishing up in front of Buckingham Palace. For more information or to sign up to take part please contact the Trust on 020 7202 0743 or [info@rcvstrust.org.uk](mailto:info@rcvstrust.org.uk).



## All eyes on anatomy

### RCVS Share Jones Lecture to cover the fine art of equine lameness diagnosis



**H**orse vets can have their questions answered by a master practitioner in the art of equine lameness diagnosis, Dr Sue Dyson FRCVS, who is to deliver the biennial Share Jones Lecture,

entitled 'Looking and seeing: the art of equine lameness diagnosis,' at the University of Nottingham's School of Veterinary Medicine and Science this November.

Dr Dyson, currently Head of Clinical Orthopaedics at the Animal Health Trust, gained her Fellowship for work on shoulder lameness in the horse. She will use case examples to illustrate the fundamental importance of a sound knowledge of anatomy, both clinically when using observation and palpation for diagnosis, and in underpinning the logical interpretation of various imaging modalities.

"With the increasing use of technology and diagnostic imaging techniques, there is a risk that we lose sight of clinical evaluation," says Dr Dyson, who stresses that diagnosing equine lameness is both "an art and a science".

Despite being free, the talk is no gift horse. RCVS Council Member Dr Barry Johnson, who nominated Dr Dyson for the lectureship, says

she is "one of the outstanding diagnosticians of the era, with an immense knowledge of anatomy," and describes watching her work as "a revelation – she really does take lameness diagnosis to another level".

Afterwards, there will be opportunity to ask questions.

The lecture will take place on Tuesday 24 November at 6pm in the lecture theatre on the Sutton Bonington Campus at the University of Nottingham. Tickets are free and refreshments will be provided. Numbers are limited, so to ensure your place, please contact Anne Jermey ([a.jermey@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:a.jermey@rcvs.org.uk) or 020 7202 0705). Parking is available at the campus and the nearest rail station is Loughborough Junction.

The Share Jones Lectureship was founded at the behest of Professor Share Jones, one of the founders of the University of Liverpool's Faculty of Veterinary Science, and is bestowed biennially upon a lecturer of special eminence in veterinary anatomy.



# Book Bomba's along to exhibition

## Library loans to Waddeston

**N**ever let it be said that RCVS Trust Library books don't go to all the best places. A 1912 edition of *Bloodstock Breeders* is featuring in a racing exhibition at Waddesdon Manor in Buckinghamshire, once the seat of the British Rothschilds, and bequeathed by James de Rothschild to the National Trust. The exhibition marks the 100th anniversary of Bomba, James de Rothschild's horse, winning the Ascot Gold Cup, and looks back at the family's love of the turf, including the establishment of the current stud farm at Waddesdon.

"It wasn't the usual type of library request," says Clare Boulton, RCVS Trust Librarian, "the historical collection is principally used by

researchers or put on display in the Library here, and it's great that more people will get to see the book in such an historic context."

The edition contains the story of Bronzino, a stallion said in his day to be the highest class horse ever shipped to stud in Australia. National Trust staff had been searching for an undamaged copy without success when at the eleventh hour they stumbled upon a copy in our online library catalogue.

*"It's great that more people will get to see the book in such an historic context."*

Diana Stone, assistant curator of the exhibition, says: "it is fantastic to have this edition as a cornerstone for the display, as there is very little information elsewhere about the story – we're very grateful to the Trust."

The exhibition 'Cardiacs Beware: the Rothschilds in Racing', will run throughout 2009. More information can be found at <http://www.waddesdon.org.uk>.



# All a Board for FVE

## New Board for European association

**A**t its recent General Assembly meeting in Stockholm, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) voted in its Board members for the next two years.

Amongst them, former RCVS Council Member Stephen Ware was re-elected as one of four

Vice-Presidents, along with Rainer Schneichel (Germany) and Ljiljana Markus-Cizelj (Croatia); Christophe Buhot (France) was elected for the first time.

Walter Winding of Austria was unanimously re-elected as FVE President.



From left: Rainer Schneichel, Ljiljana Markus-Cizelj, Walter Winding, Stephen Ware and Christophe Buhot.

## Governance group formed

**C**ouncil has agreed that a new permanent Governance Review Group be established, with the aim of overseeing all of the College's governance arrangements; carrying out a rolling programme of review to ensure that all aspects of governance are kept up to date; and, appointing an external panel to investigate and adjudicate on any alleged breaches of the Code of Conduct for Managing Conflicts of Interest.

The Committee will comprise three members: a past lay member of Council, a vet who has not sat on Council and a lay Chairman.

## Dog welfare survey

**T**he Royal Veterinary College is calling for experts to respond to a survey about dog welfare issues in Great Britain. The aim is to produce a benchmark against which to monitor companion dog welfare progress. The survey is anonymous – if you would like to take part, visit [www.rvc.ac.uk/survey](http://www.rvc.ac.uk/survey) before 30 June 2009.

## The dog ate my fee notice...

...and it was delivered to mum and dad's address. These are two of the worst excuses we've heard recently for failing to pay retention fees, and they don't wash when it comes to being removed from the Register – particularly since veterinary surgeons are obliged to update their details if they move from the address on the Register. Vets can use either a practice or home address, but must keep the entry up-to-date.

Most people do manage to get their retention fees paid in time – and it would be extremely unfair to them not to remove those who don't pay. We are currently processing removals and expect to take almost 700 veterinary surgeons off the Register. As usual we will publish a list of their names on *RCVSONline* – it is illegal for anyone not on the Register to practise veterinary surgery in the UK. To be restored to the Register costs at least £294 – fees go up if you're removed more than once. You can check your Register entry is correct at [www.rcvs.org.uk/register](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/register) and find information about applying for restoration at [www.rcvs.org.uk/restoration](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/restoration).

## Raising new standards

### PSS standards review

**T**he Practice Standards Group is nearly ready to launch its draft of the new standards.

When the Scheme was launched in 2005, a commitment was made that the standards would not change for five years, unless new legislation (such as the Veterinary Medicines Regulations) required it.

The standards are now being reviewed for implementation during 2010, to make sure that they remain relevant to current veterinary practice.

The five-year review has given us the opportunity to make some timely adjustments to the original standards, placing greater emphasis on clinical outcomes and training. We have also revamped the layout of the Manual to incorporate guidance alongside the standards rather than in a separate document.

In addition, the new format clarifies the derivation of each standard, so that legislative requirements are distinguished from those required under the *RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct* and those indicated by better practice.

Feedback is currently being received from the members of the Practice Standards Group, who represent all of the key veterinary organisations. The draft standards will then be published on RCVSONline over the summer to allow all stakeholders the change to have their say. The final version will be launched during early 2010.

## In(vestigator) training

### New complaints investigators learn the ropes

**O**ur four recently-appointed veterinary investigators, who work with the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC), have been put through their paces in an intensive two-day training course.

They were submersed in the new disciplinary and complaints procedures, focusing on the three stages in the PIC decision-making process: assessment, at which the potential for the complaint to go further is considered; case examination, where the likelihood of a case being built is reviewed; and the Committee stage, in which the realistic prospect of a charge being carried is assessed.

*“The role of the investigators is to.....gather information to help process a complaint.”*

The investigators, who are not RCVS Council members, were then trained in interview technique, through role-playing.

The role of the investigators is to visit and interview veterinary surgeons and complainants to gather information about a complaint; in practice this often means the complaint can be closed. Interviews ‘under caution’ will be carried out only following written notification and with a senior member of the RCVS Professional Conduct Department.



## Legislation – priorities agreed

### Council agrees new strategy

**C**ouncil has now considered the options for bringing about changes in the *Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966* and decided on the way ahead.

In 2005, following two consultations, Council called for changes which would have brought the RCVS broadly into line with the regulators of the human health professions. The legal framework within which they operate has been rewritten in recent years. Last year, however, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced that it did not plan to take steps to update the *Veterinary Surgeons Act* for the time being. The Veterinary Legislation Group, chaired by Professor Stuart Reid, was asked to advise Council how it might proceed. At its June meeting, Council considered the Group’s report, which identified three priorities.

One was to put in place new disciplinary machinery for veterinary surgeons. The Act requires the Preliminary Investigation and

Disciplinary Committees to be composed entirely of members of the RCVS Council. In the interests of fairness and transparency, the Disciplinary Committee should not include Council members, and there ought to be flexibility over the make-up of the Preliminary Investigation Committee.

*“In the interests of fairness and transparency, the Disciplinary Committee should not include Council members.”*

Secondly, the Group recommended widening the disciplinary jurisdiction so that it relates to all aspects of fitness to practise and not just conduct. Alongside a new jurisdiction, the Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees would be given more flexible powers.

Thirdly, the report invited Council to review its own composition.

The RCVS cannot itself change the composition of the Preliminary Investigation and Disciplinary Committees or of the RCVS Council - these are laid down in the Act. The Government could, however, use a regulatory reform order to make changes of this kind. Changes to the disciplinary jurisdiction and powers could only be achieved by Parliament passing primary legislation.

The Group expressed the hope that the RCVS would continue to seek statutory regulation for veterinary nurses. Substantial new legislation will be needed for this purpose. In the meanwhile, the right steps have been taken to prepare for this by setting up the Register of Veterinary Nurses under powers in the Royal Charter.

After considering the report, Council agreed to consult the veterinary and veterinary nursing professions. Council will consider the recommendations of the report further, taking account of the views expressed in response to the consultation.



# Calling time on 24/7?

## Profession invited to comment: no quick fixes

**O**ut-of-hours cover has been an issue ever since the phone was invented," commented one Council Member at an informal meeting of RCVS Council that took place on 4 June to look at the issue of how the profession provides 24/7 emergency cover. It has certainly been a frequent topic in RCVS News.

Last year, Advisory Committee convened a Working Party to consider the College's guidance on 24-hour emergency cover (24/7). In turn, the Working Party commissioned independent research from Noesis Market Intelligence to build an evidence base on how the profession is meeting the current requirement, and to canvass opinion on whether it should be retained.

The feeling from this research, and other evidence, was that animals deserve access to 24/7 and the profession wanted to provide it.



The question is, how can the profession provide it in a way that both meets Working Time Regulations (WTR) and enables practices to operate sustainably? This was the dilemma put to a mixed group of Council Members, representatives from veterinary organisations, veterinary practitioners and the media.

***"The profession should be proud of the service it offers."***

Chairman of Advisory Committee, Professor Neil Gorman, opened the proceedings by saying that although 24/7 was perceived as an issue, the profession should in fact be proud of the service it offers, in spite of the tension between the RCVS guidance and the requirements of the WTR.

Next, the group heard a series of short presentations to set the scene. Nicky Paull, President of the British Veterinary Association, stressed the fact that the RCVS needs to take care of its members' welfare, to make sure that they, in turn, can take care of animal welfare. She said she was present 'in listening mode' and appreciated it was the College's role to set the rules, and that of the BVA to do what it could to assist the profession in sticking to them.

### Rota numbers

Richard Hillman, Immediate Past-President of the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, presented the results of an exercise he had carried out into the number of vets required to share an out-of-hours rota, based on their normal working hours. He found that vets working 38 hours a week required a rota of 14, and those working a 40-hour week, a rota of 18. But after this point the rota numbers shot up rapidly, so those working a 47-hour week would require 143 vets in their rota. He also called for clarification on what constituted working time when on call, and the need for the RCVS to accept that clients would have to travel further and wait longer because of the WTR. He supported the use of Workforce Agreements: "they are legitimate ways of working, not loopholes," he said.

The meeting then turned to Brian Pound, Corporate Development and Acquisitions Director of CVS (UK) Ltd, who outlined the myriad of ways in which practices in the group met the 24/7 obligations. He admitted that some smaller practices in the company struggled to do this legally, and that if the 48-hour opt-out was withdrawn, this would be a

significant issue. This was followed by Bristol-based practitioner Joseph Tristram, who outlined the route his practice had taken towards providing out-of-hours cover, starting with a rota among local practices, switching to using one local practice and ending by using Vets Now's services. He identified pluses and minuses with all options but acknowledged that, as a four-vet practice, it would not be possible to offer OOH themselves. Clients were happy with the current service although they found the costs high.

### Consumer insight

Finally, Rebecca Davies, veterinary surgeon and market research specialist from Onswitch, gave the consumers' point of view. Their research indicated that providing clients were aware of the 24-hour provisions in advance, they were not troubled, she said, pointing out that 10% of clients they had spoken to gave out-of-hours cover arrangements as a decision-making factor when choosing a practice.

***"The importance of understanding the views of clients was stressed by lay members of Council."***

Discussion then took place, with points including whether the current guidance was in breach of the Competition Act, given that 68% of vets surveyed in the Noesis study felt compliance was a barrier to setting up a practice; to what extent home visits should be mandatory; the responsibility of owners to ensure they can access appropriate cover for their animals; the specific problems surrounding nurses who sleep on-site when on-call – and are often keen to work as much overtime as they can; the risk of legal repercussions for both vet and employer if an over-worked vet is involved in a road accident; and, the need for more realistic out-of-hours fees to be charged.

The importance of understanding the views of clients was stressed by lay members of Council, with the encouragement that "the profession should not be afraid to hear what they say".

There were no magic bullets here. Advisory Committee still has some work to do, and will consider a plan of action in time for its September meeting. It is likely to consider communicating with the public – both to better understand their views and to educate them about the problems faced by the profession – and continuing to build its evidence base with the addition of economic and business planning data.

# Time to blow the whistle?

## Where to turn for advice

**T**wo recent cases have seen professionals so unhappy at work that they called in the TV cameras to blow the whistle on bad practice. In both cases - a teacher and a registered nurse - the individuals were struck off from their respective professional registers for breach of confidentiality.

Whether or not you agree with their decision to call in the cameras - or indeed the findings of their regulatory bodies - we clearly need to avoid veterinary employees feeling that such action, damaging for all concerned, is their only recourse.

There will no doubt be some rare occasions when veterinary surgeons or veterinary nurses witness something within the practice with which they disagree, but feel powerless to act upon. As well as such cases of bad practice potentially putting animals and their owners at risk, veterinary surgeons and registered veterinary nurses carry responsibility for their professional practice, so it may have an impact on their own conduct.

What should someone do in such a situation? The first port of call would be to discuss the matter with a line manager or senior mentor, if one exists. If this is felt not to be possible, or does not produce the desired result, make use

of external resources. Both the British Veterinary Association and British Veterinary Nursing Association have legal helplines for members. If the problem relates to bullying within the practice, try the Vet Helpline, which is there for both vets and veterinary nurses, or the advice website [www.vetlife.org.uk](http://www.vetlife.org.uk).

If you are working in a veterinary nurse training practice, and the matter is pertinent to the training environment, it would also be a good idea to contact your centre. If the cause for concern relates more specifically to professional practice - particularly an ethical issue - contact our advice team in the Professional Conduct Department: calls are confidential. In any kind of dispute it is important to keep full and detailed records of what went on, so that if you are later called to account for your actions, you can explain what happened.

We would always rather help at an early stage than wait until a formal complaint needs to be made and someone feels compelled to leave their practice. That way the problem might be solved, rather than remaining a trap for a new employee to fall into.

In fact, the situation can work both ways - if you have an employee who is suspected of serious problems, for example, drugs offences

or theft - it's better for the profession at large if they are not just asked to leave, and so move to the next unsuspecting practice, but if the case is reported to the police for investigation.



## Useful numbers

**The RCVS will be talking to the representative bodies to develop additional advice on this topic, in the meantime, you might find these numbers useful:**

**BVA Members Legal Helpline:**  
020 7636 6541

**BVNA Members Legal Helpline:**  
01279 408 644

**Vet Helpline:**  
07659 811 118

**RCVS Professional Conduct Department:**  
020 7202 0789

# Overseas polo vets

## New Advice Note published



Photo courtesy of the Hurlingham Polo Association

**A**n Advice Note offering guidance to those veterinary surgeons involved with polo has been published online at [www.rcvs.org.uk/advicenotes](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/advicenotes) ('Advice note for overseas veterinary surgeons visiting the UK').

Often, overseas vets come to the UK with a polo team. Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966, such veterinary surgeons must be registered with the RCVS if they are to practise in the UK, even if such practice is restricted to working with an overseas polo team. In addition, it is illegal for certain categories of veterinary medicines to be prescribed in the UK, or medicines imported into the UK, by anyone other than a registered veterinary surgeon. A licence is required for the importation of medicines.

There are various types of registration possible for these purposes which, in the main, depend on where the vet qualified and is practising currently. For some, this would have to be full home-practising registration, for others, perhaps temporary registration for a restricted period and subject to conditions.

UK equine veterinary surgeons involved with polo are advised to ensure any visiting veterinary surgeons they may work with in terms of collaboration or referral are properly registered.

Although the RCVS has no jurisdiction over non-registered veterinary surgeons, it works with the relevant enforcement body - usually the police or Trading Standards - to assist where veterinary surgery has been carried out illegally.



# Premises Register – no change

## VMRs 2009 will not broaden remit of Register

**The Register of Veterinary Practice Premises (RVPP) came into effect on 1 April 2009 and currently contains over 4,500 practice premises. It is now unlawful for a veterinary surgeon to supply medicines from practice premises that are unregistered.**

The RVPP was a requirement of the Veterinary Medicines Regulations (VMRs) 2008. The VMRs are remade each year and draft 2009 regulations are currently in a consultation phase.

One change proposed by the Veterinary Medicines Directorate had been to broaden the definition of premises required to be registered from 'veterinary practice premises' to any premises (paragraph 8.1 of the draft Regulations for 2009). This was intended to address a potential loophole in relation to the storage and administration of Controlled

Drugs purchased by veterinary surgeons for administration to their own animals at otherwise unregistered premises. However, the RCVS felt that this change was unworkable, as it would mean the extension of the Register to include many premises not envisaged in the original agreement, potentially including veterinary surgeons' homes and clients' premises. Following a meeting between the RCVS and the VMD, the Directorate has agreed not to proceed with the proposed amendment.

At its meeting in June, Council also felt that the VMD's ability to make fundamental amendments to the VMRs on an annual basis was onerous for the profession and should be questioned in the light of government policy to reduce regulatory burdens.

## PPE advice re-examined

Following publication of a new Advice Note on pre-purchase examinations (PPE) at the end of last year, a Working Party (WP) was set up to consider various issues arising.

The WP recently recommended amending the emphasis of the current guidance so as not to discourage vets from carrying out PPEs on behalf of the purchaser when they are also the vendor's vet. It was agreed that it was neither practical nor viable to introduce a system where it was mandatory to obtain clinical notes as routine prior to conducting a PPE. The WP also recommended that the current guidance should be amended to state that veterinary surgeons must disclose any conflicts of interest to the purchaser, who may then decide whether to ask for another vet to carry out the PPE. The current guidance provides that a veterinary surgeon may be advised to disclose such information.

The Advisory Committee accepted these proposals, but wished to consider further issues before finalising them at its next meeting in September.

# Bees under your care?

## Interim advice on prescribing medicines for bees

**Honeybees are susceptible to a variety of threats, including infestations of mites and the viruses associated with them. Threats have increased significantly in recent years, too, causing rising losses of bee colonies. A variety of new viruses originating from Europe and America have proved to be increasingly resistant to the eradication treatments available.**

Consequently, the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) and beekeeper

***“Veterinary surgeons may apply for Special Import Certificates or Special Treatment Certificates on behalf of beekeepers.”***

representatives have agreed there is an urgent need to make Continental European treatments available in the UK to combat this problem. The VMD will also be seeking to develop a

Suitably Qualified Person (SQP) qualification for beekeepers, and legislation to enable them to prescribe appropriate medicinal products.

The Advisory Committee has therefore been considering what advice to issue to the profession in the interim. Its resulting Advice Note, setting out advice on the prescription of POM-V medicinal products for bees, was approved by Council at its June meeting.

In it, the Committee confirms that veterinary surgeons may apply for Special Import Certificates or Special Treatment Certificates on behalf of beekeepers, and prescribe medicines for the bees.

It also addresses the issue of when bees can be considered 'under the care' of the veterinary surgeon, in order for them to prescribe the medication. In the current circumstances, and in light of the urgent need for treatments, the Committee has stated that it may not be necessary for the veterinary surgeon to visit the beehives before prescribing, as would normally be the case.

The veterinary surgeon must still, however, take professional responsibility for the prescriptions, maintain appropriate clinical records and comply with the responsibilities for the supply of medicines.

The Advice Note (number 28) will be published on RCVSonline at [www.rcvs.org.uk/advicenotes](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/advicenotes).



# Going modular for CPD

## VNs take modular route to DipAVN

**T**he public expect those to whom they entrust the care of their animals to keep their knowledge and skills up to date, and by introducing mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) for Registered Veterinary Nurses, the VN profession is rising to the challenge. The emphasis on CPD has won VNs greater recognition, including opportunities to progress into management roles and to specialise. It is unsurprising, then, that there should be a demand from VNs – and their employers – for new ways of achieving advanced qualifications, such as the RCVS Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (DipAVN).

A new module-credit route to the DipAVN qualification was introduced in 2007, and is designed to let you study in your own time and at your own pace whilst working in practice. To gain the qualification, you need to achieve 150 credits within five years, from a combination of core and option modules – which means study can be tailored towards your particular needs and interests. You also need to have completed a year's post-qualification experience in practice and be employed in – or have access to a placement in – either a training practice or a Practice Standards Scheme General Practice or Hospital.



Perdi Welsh

To achieve the qualification, you can either take a course that fulfils the RCVS module and credit requirements, such as the Diploma of Higher Education Clinical Veterinary Nursing (DipHE CVN) offered by the University of Central Lancashire through Myerscough College – plus an extra final module, or use the accredited prior learning system to enrol with the RCVS and build up credits from individual qualifying modules. You can gain up to 80 credits from modules taken before enrolling, then add further modules as you achieve them, until you have completed the core modules and 'banked' the 150 credits needed to qualify. You will also need to renew this enrolment registration on an annual basis until you have completed the DipAVN.

"These qualifications are relevant to modern veterinary nursing practice," says Kathy

Kissick, Head of Veterinary Nursing at Myerscough College. "It is about promoting and recognising the need for more professional responsibility for VNs, and getting VNs to think more formally and in a structured way about the nursing they do, for example, in the decisions and ethics involved in euthanasia, or care plans."

### Care planning

Rachel Beauchamp, an orthopaedic nurse at Torrington Orthopedics in West Yorkshire, agrees. Rachel had just started the DipAVN through Myerscough College when she applied for her current role, and says being signed up to the DipAVN helped her to get the job. "Care planning wasn't a concept I had come across before and I wasn't sure how they could be fitted into everyday veterinary practice," she says. "However, having done the module, I now understand them better and what I have learnt will inform my practice." Rachel is on track to be one of the first VNs to complete the new DipAVN, and thinks that the first year modules give an important grounding for VNs. "Understanding the ethics of the profession in particular is necessary," she says, "although it does make you explore some uncomfortable issues."

***"It is about promoting and recognising the need for more professional responsibility."***

Debbie Gudgeon, Practice Manager of Wood Green Animal Shelter in London, is on the first-year of the new Graduate Diploma in Professional and Clinical Veterinary Nursing at the Royal Veterinary College, and will be able to count credit for some of the modules from this course towards a DipAVN if she chooses to

enrol. She agrees that it's important for VNs to fully understand the professional framework in which they practise. "It's more than just reading the *Guide to Professional Conduct for Veterinary Nurses*," explains Debbie, "the



Debbie Gudgeon

course gave an example of an animal needing analgesia and not being able to reach the vet. We looked at this from the legal, ethical and professional viewpoints, which really made you think about what was involved."

Debbie has worked in veterinary nursing for 22 years and has seen how the role has changed. "I used to think nurses didn't need fancy qualifications," says Debbie, "but veterinary nursing has changed and become a profession in its own right. Doing advanced qualifications is about keeping on raising the standards – VNs can't afford to be complacent!"

Presently, the modules which can be counted towards the DipAVN are offered only by Myerscough and the RVC, and we are encouraging other course providers to seek module accreditation. A list of modules from the RVC's graduate diploma, and the DipAVN modules to which they relate, is in the box below. As Perdi Welsh, Programme Director at the RVC, says, "there is a demand for advanced nursing education and qualifications. In the past, there has been a lack of available qualifications for veterinary nurses who wanted to develop their professional and clinical skills, and there is clearly interest which needs to be catered for."

DipAVN modules for which credit can be gained from the corresponding RVC Graduate Diploma modules.

**RCVS Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing**  
Law, ethics and professional practice  
Applied essential physiology  
Systematic delivery of nursing  
Anaesthetic nursing  
Diagnostic imaging

**RVC Graduate Diploma in Veterinary Nursing**  
Professional studies  
Problem solving in veterinary physiology  
Applied clinical nursing  
Anaesthesia incorporating analgesia  
Diagnostic imaging



“The advantage for practices,” says Kathy, “is that their VNs become more enquiring, and more confident academically - which can also be challenging!” Giving VNs the chance to progress academically can also help with motivation and retention, and practices can get more out of VNs who are confident and up-to-date, such as better informed contributions to revising practice protocols.

Both the Myerscough and RVC courses are ‘blended learning’ – a mix of mainly online learning with some face-to-face residential study. Both courses start with an induction period at the college, and Myerscough College structures a series of residential study weekends into the course.

Hayley Carne, a senior surgery nurse at the RVC’s Queen Mother Hospital, is doing the Graduate Diploma in Professional and Clinical Veterinary Nursing, and likes studying online as “it fits in well with shifts and funny hours,” although she says it took a bit of getting used to as you have to go out and find things for yourself. Learning online is very different from the “chalk and talk,” as Kathy puts it, of VN training, however regular coursework, specialist tutors, and online discussion and collaboration help keep up momentum and give you support.

### Support

Although the majority of both courses is delivered online, support from employers and veterinary colleagues is essential. “Primarily, this means access to case studies and academic support – veterinary surgeons have been to university and know what is expected,” says Kathy. “Vets can also discuss matters like scholarly referencing with VNs, and encourage academic discussion at work. Help with access to journals and textbooks is useful too – as is time for study and research.” The written exam is taken at the practice so the VN’s practice is asked to provide an invigilator who is either a vet or VN to sit in with the VN during the exam.

The DipAVN is a huge step up from the NVQ and is meant to be challenging – and as the credits are also transferable within the higher education system, universities recognise them for entry onto degree-level qualifications. The workload is demanding and Rachel advises VNs to think carefully how they will manage this alongside their job. But if you are seeking career progression and want to develop your nursing practice, then this new route to the qualification might be exactly what you are looking for.

Further information about the DipAVN can be found at [www.rcvs.org.uk/DipAVN](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/DipAVN).

For information about courses whose modules attract credits that can be used to qualify for a DipAVN, please contact Kathy Kissick, Myerscough College or Perdi Welsh, RVC.



## Can EAEVE and the FVE ensure parity of European standards of training?

**Dr Robin G Oakley, Director, European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) Evaluation/Accreditation Programme**

### Consistency of European standards

**T**he quick answer, at present, is “no”. The more considered answer is that EAEVE can have a significant influence on the overall standard of veterinary education offered by its 97 member establishments, since membership obliges all members to submit to a “peer evaluation system” within a limited period of time and then every eight to ten years. There are 110 training establishments in Europe and EAEVE currently covers 86% of the field. Whilst national legislation and local conditions vary considerably, the EAEVE/Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE) Evaluation Programme uses as its basis the training guidelines laid down in the Directive 2005/36/EC, whether the member establishment being visited is within or without the European Union.

Prior to 2007, it was the norm that three to five visitations would be made per year. One does not need to be a whiz-kid in arithmetic to realise that, at that rate, it would take over 20 years to visit all member establishments. For this reason, the whole system has been reorganised, rationalised and modernised. New Standard Operating Procedures were introduced in 2008 and a new streamlined visitation schedule has been in use since autumn 2007, which reduces the burden of time and commitment for both the visiting team and the establishment being visited, without adversely affecting the outcome.

The EAEVE process involves two stages. The first is a complete evaluation of the course contents and facilities by an expert team of six, which can lead to approval. Stage 2 investigates the quality assurance procedures in place (including student critiques) to examine and control the quality of the teaching offered by the staff: passing this stage results in accreditation. In 2009, EAEVE/FVE will make 10 full Stage 1 evaluation visits and two Stage 2 visits, as well as two revisits. In 2010, 15 Stage 1 visitations are currently planned. Two Stage 2 visitations have also been applied for in 2010, and a joint RCVS/EAEVE visit to the RVC will cover Stages 1 and 2 in February 2010.

It is hoped that the number of ‘approved’ and even ‘approved and accredited’ establishments will rise continuously, because these status groups will offer a virtual certainty that the veterinary education offered is of an acceptable European standard.

EAEVE is striving to improve itself on an ongoing basis and is making a significant effort to meet the membership requirements for ENQA, the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, and to generate recognition from the European Commission that teaching establishments approved by EAEVE/FVE offer graduates adequately trained to become Official Veterinarians as defined in the Annex to Food Hygiene Regulation/2004/524/EC, without further examination.

EAEVE has just had its annual General Assembly in Hanover (28-29 May 2009), where many of the “tools” necessary for the rapid enhancement of the Association’s aims and objectives in relation to the harmonisation of training across Europe were approved.

**The European Association of Establishments for Veterinary Education (EAEVE) was founded in 1988 and has 97 member establishments. It aims to support, promote and develop veterinary education in Europe in all its aspects. For more information, including lists of approved institutions, visit [www.eaeve.org](http://www.eaeve.org).**

# You're not from around here, are you?

Exploring some of the culture shocks experienced by overseas vets in the UK

**T**hey say that moving house is one of the one most stressful life events there is; right up there with job interviews, leaving home, and travelling in a foreign country. But what happens when you do all of those things at the same time? *RCVS News* takes a closer look at the challenges facing overseas vets who come to work in the UK, how things taken for granted here can often seem very strange to those from distant shores, and what advice they might have for both newcomers and those who employ them.

"I hate me kids, but me dogs? Oh, I love me dogs!"

A rather extreme viewpoint, you might agree, even for this little island nation of so-called animal lovers, so imagine what it must have sounded like to someone from a culture a world away from our own...

Someone like Korean veterinary surgeon Jee Young Shin, for example, who moved to the UK in 1997 and heard this from a client after starting practice in London a few years later. Whilst Koreans might not be too fond of cats (most are feral and, as traditional omens of evil, viewed with some trepidation), Young maintains her compatriots hold a growing affection for dogs, although it very definitely doesn't extend to substitution of family members.



Nick Valley

"We always had one or more dogs around while I was growing up," she says, "but they were still dogs, not people. I still find it strange the way people here humanise their pets." Not that she thinks the general level of care shown to pets in the UK is a bad thing: "The extent to which people here love their pets and are prepared to pay to look after them is something I like about the UK. Whilst there is a growing fashion for pocket-sized pets in Korea, the understanding of the animals' actual needs is still lagging way behind."

Iranian veterinary surgeon Nick Valley, who moved here in 1994, shared Young's initial amazement at the Brits' attitudes towards their beloved pets, and especially dogs, which, under Islamic law, are considered untouchable. He recalls one of his first UK clients who brought in a dog that was so hugely obese, its belly was dragging on the floor. "Is that a dog or a seal?" he asked. Shocked by his client's reaction, as she first swore at him, and then fled sobbing from the practice, never to return, Nick remembers that his boss didn't need to tell him twice.

Neither are such cultural differences confined to just small animals. There are no pet horses in Chile, for example, as veterinary surgeon Fernanda Sepulveda explains: "The attitude to horses in Chile is completely different. Whether they're for racing, pony clubs, or 'riding for the disabled', they are all just work horses, nothing more.

"The amount of veterinary care afforded to horses in Chile is therefore directly proportional to the potential income they can generate. The very deep emotional attachment that you see here in the UK, where people are prepared to retire their animals and still look after them, is very rare indeed."

Like the UK, however, Fernanda says Chile is a nation of dog and cat lovers, who are willing to pay far more for their animals'

healthcare. "It's in our nature to haggle, though, so clients will always try to negotiate a lower price!"

#### Why move?

The Home Office has listed the

veterinary profession as a Skills Shortage Occupation for a number of years now, and did so again last year (*RCVS News*, November 2008). And a good job too. Only 1% of the profession in the UK is unemployed, but, on average, less than half of all vets registered each year have graduated from UK universities. Without this overseas contribution, therefore, it's likely the UK veterinary profession would struggle to cope with demand.

***"I still find it strange the way people here humanise their pets."***

The vast majority (98%) of overseas graduates hail from either the European Economic Area (EEA) or English-speaking countries, such as Canada, Australia, South Africa etc. They may register automatically, providing they have a recognised veterinary qualification. The small minority who graduate elsewhere are also required to pass the RCVS Statutory Examination for Membership. However, with an average pass rate of just 25% over the past five years, this is certainly no walk in the park. So why do people like Fernanda, Nick and Young put themselves through such an ordeal?

"Of all the exams I've ever taken, the Stat Exam was the worst of all!" concedes Fernanda, who said she had to re-learn a lot of material she hadn't covered for a while, such as farm animal medicine. "But it did give me the chance to shadow other vets here, which I found very interesting and instructive, so that was a good thing."

"My husband and I only planned to live in the UK for a couple of years – him to do an MBA and me a Masters – and then head home again," says Fernanda, "but the opportunities kept coming up so we took them. The level of medical care for horses in Chile is way below what it is here, so I've been able to learn far more."

Young, too, had never planned to live and work abroad, but came to the UK to study. "I wanted to run with lions," she says, "so applied for a Masters in wild animal medicine." Whilst thoroughly enjoying the course ("I got to shoot a real gun!"), she realised the veterinary work would be more about conservation than actually treating animals, so decided to sit the Stat Exam so she could start to work in small animal practice.

"The exam itself was unlike anything I had seen before, and I could have done with some more guidance and support. Had I been completely new to the British education



system, I would have really struggled. That was a few years ago though; I think there's more guidance available now."

#### What's in a name?

So, armed with a veterinary degree, an RCVS exam pass and a good command of English, the UK veterinary job market must be at the newly domiciled vet's feet...

Not exactly, says Nick, whose former name was Ali Valizadeh: "I applied anywhere and everywhere for a job, but I wasn't even getting any interviews. I'd noticed that people had trouble pronouncing my family name and I began to wonder if it was an obstacle. So, I changed it." Less than a week later and 'Nick Valley' had been invited to three interviews and offered three jobs.



Jee Young Shin

#### "You wot, darlin'?"

As a nation, we're not renowned for our language skills, in fact we're notoriously impatient when English isn't spoken abroad, let alone at home, so it's perhaps not surprising that each of our interviewees experienced some communications barriers to begin with, especially where regional accents were concerned.

"To begin with, I struggled," admits Young, "especially in London where there are people from so many different places. My English was good, as I'd worked here as a waitress and a receptionist previously, but all the different accents really threw me. As long as you're prepared to make the effort, though, communication is never really a problem. I've developed the confidence just to tell people if I don't understand them and we can then work it out differently. If there's a risk of misunderstanding an important clinical matter, I would always ask a colleague to help."

Fernanda felt pretty confident initially, too: "I'd worked as a translator in Chile for all sorts of medical and veterinary congresses, so I thought my English would be fine. But then I came across all these different accents and didn't understand a thing! That, plus all the acronyms vets use here, meant I spent the first three months just trying to understand people. It was very confusing!"

#### *"Don't move here without a job or a placement lined up first."*

Nick learned English mainly from books, so had similar problems to start with: "You don't learn about regional accents just by reading," he laughs. But he's critical of the disparity in language requirements of vets from within and outside the EU. "I interviewed a [European] vet recently and his English was terrible, it would never have worked. But I know of vets from non-English speaking countries outside Europe whose language skills are more than adequate for practice, yet because they haven't been able to get the required grade in the IELTS [International English Language Testing System], they can't sit the Stat Exam.

"One guy I know has had to start working in a kebab shop just to get by, and he's a veterinary surgeon! I do think the College needs to lower the stipulated grade."

#### What's acceptable?

Communicating with clients is one thing, being accepted by them is quite another.

"I remember one elderly Cockney woman who was just like Catherine Tate's 'Nan' character," says Young. "After I'd sorted out her snappy little dog, she announced to the receptionist that she didn't want to see that 'Chinese prostitute' anymore!"

"The nurses were horrified on my behalf, but I thought it was hilarious and took it as a challenge. I eventually managed to make 'Nan' like me and she wouldn't see anyone but me after that.



Fernanda Sepulveda

Both Nick and Fernanda agree that if you're willing to put the work in, clients will keep coming back.

"I've been very pleasantly surprised how friendly and open everyone has been," says Fernanda. "I think if it comes across in your work how much you care, then people will make more effort to understand you and accept your various quirks!"

#### Some advice for overseas vets...

Unsurprisingly, whilst all three remark on differences in veterinary practice between the UK and their countries of birth, each offers the same advice to others who might be considering moving here to work: study for the Stat Exam and spend as much time as possible seeing UK practice and shadowing UK vets.

"Do your research about where you want to be and keep studying for the exam because it's bloody difficult!" says Fernanda. "Make sure you see lots of practice, and when you do, be pleasant, seem interested (even if you're not), ask lots of questions, don't interfere, and never, never, query something in front of the client!"

"Above all, don't move here without having a job or a placement lined up first and make sure your CPD is up date. UK vets are very well trained and it can be quite competitive."

#### ...and for UK employers

"Foreign vets are weather proof!" jokes Young, "hot sunny days are unlikely to be a deterrent to working hard as they're not as unusual overseas as they are here!"

Nick is more direct. "As an employer, I always choose on merit and experience, but at the same time, you should be prepared to give people a chance, irrespective of where they're from or how difficult their name is to pronounce. We're prepared to give young graduates additional time and support when they start out in practice, and the same should apply for overseas vets. Their circumstances can often be quite difficult, but give them the opportunity and they'll invariably turn out to be very conscientious and hard-working."



## Paper-free portfolios

### New VN e-portfolios to save trees and stress

**O**ver the past year, the Veterinary Nursing Awarding Body has been investigating the possibility of online portfolios and assessment for student VNs.

Several software companies now offer reliable, user-friendly and secure systems for building, assessing and quality-assuring NVQ portfolios, and a successful trial has been carried out with Level 3 VN candidates at Plumpton College in East Sussex. Seven candidates and their training practice assessors were given the opportunity to undertake their Level 3 assessment using the Skillwise online portfolio and all have been very enthusiastic about the experience.

One of the key benefits of the online system is that the candidate does not lose possession of the portfolio at any time for either assessment or internal verification. Assessors and internal verifiers can log into any of 'their' portfolios at any time, using a secure log-in. This factor alone has saved a huge amount of time and effort usually spent transporting and storing portfolios, and it means the candidate can keep on collecting evidence.

Communication is far quicker, as is the recording of evidence. "The layout of the portfolio is clear and well designed, allowing

the students easily to visualise their progress," according to Sarah Cottingham, Project Co-ordinator at Plumpton. "Feedback from students has identified this as being extremely motivating in completing their work. The ability to remotely access student and assessor work allows greater flexibility and therefore efficiency within the vet practice and centre team."

Another major benefit is the ability to use a wide range of evidence, such as photographs or video and audio files.

There are, of course, some downsides. Not all practices are happy to allow staff to use the internet, which is a crucial resource for this system, and not all have a reasonably fast connection. There is also a cost to be borne, at present around £100 per candidate (£50 per NVQ). Although these cannot be discounted, the Plumpton pilot indicates the savings in terms of staff time and, in the case of internal verifiers, travel, more than offset the extra cost.

Following a meeting on 6 May of our Heads of Centre, when the Plumpton experience was discussed, at least two more centres seem keen to trial the electronic route and we look forward to hearing their feedback. Meanwhile, the traditional hard copy portfolio will remain in place.

## Wot no NVQs?

### Significant review of VN awards

**T**he most significant review of VN qualifications for many years is underway, and we need your views. At its May meeting, VN Council agreed an action plan for the review and reaccreditation of our VN awards, which needs to be completed by next summer in order to meet the timetable for Ofqual's implementation of the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF).

The new QCF aims to provide a more user-friendly and flexible system. Under the new arrangements, all qualifications will carry a 'value' in terms of their level and the volume of learning involved. It's a similar system to that used in higher education for a number of years.

The review of our awards will also take place alongside Lantra's review of the National Occupational Standards (NOS) for VNs: the NOS describe what a person needs to do, know and understand in their job in order to carry out their role in a consistent and competent way.

The new national awards framework means that NVQs as such will disappear and the process of review opens up the whole qualification structure, allowing us to create a more flexible

system to suit better the needs of the veterinary nursing profession and employers. Future options include potentially placing more of the



responsibility for education and basic skills on the colleges, leaving practices to concentrate on providing quality mentorship and work experience, with less emphasis on assessment.

Consideration will also be given to providing part of VN training and education within full-time further education, which is possible now that the lower age limit for VN students has been dropped.

We are keen to hear your views and a consultation letter has been sent to those involved with the delivery of VN training to investigate views on the future options. Topics on which views are sought include the range and level of knowledge and skills delivered by the current awards, the impact of training on employers of student VNs, meeting the increased demand for qualified VNs, and providing VNs for mixed or equine practices.

Over summer, evidence-gathering meetings will be held at the RCVS to explore the issues in more depth. If you have not been sent a formal consultation letter and would like to contribute, your views are welcome. Please email [vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk).



# PDPeasy

## Tips for new graduates

**We recently carried out a survey amongst those recent graduates who completed the Professional Development Phase (PDP) in 2007-8, to help identify any problems or areas where more communication was required. Based on the feedback, here are some hints and tips for new graduates.**

PDP is an online, password-protected system that will help you turn your day-one competences into useable, practical skills. To get the most out of PDP, you should review progress continually, making a conscious effort to fine-tune your skills. This means using the notes section to be self-reflective, noting observations, your strengths and weaknesses and ideas for developing your skills further. The survey results suggest that those who spent time completing the notes section got far more out of the PDP as a whole.

The PDP system is there to assist you to think about what you are doing and to encourage you to continue to develop your competence. Feedback suggests that some feel they have wasted time recording, for example, endless vaccination skills, but there is no need to keep recording a skill once you feel you are competent: just add a note to that effect.

Remember to read the guidance on the site. Everything is explained in full and there is a comprehensive FAQ section. If you still aren't sure, you can email your allocated Postgraduate Dean (PGD) direct through the site and they will be happy to help you.

The PDP should take about a year to complete. The main indication that you are ready to sign off is if you are able to perform a range of



common clinical procedures, or manage them without close supervision, in a reasonable period of time and with a high probability of a successful outcome. If you are unsure, email your PGD for guidance.

If you are not yet signed up, email [pdp@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:pdp@rcvs.org.uk) to ask for a password. Let us have your full name, RCVS registration number, contact details and email address. Don't forget, you can't sign up for an RCVS Certificate until you have completed your PDP.

## Exam dates

Dates and venues for the 2009 RCVS Certificate and Diploma written examinations are as follows:

### Certificates

Either Tuesday 21 or Wednesday 22 July 2009 – depending on subject – at the Emmanuel Centre, Marsham Street, London SW1 3DW.

### Diplomas

Tuesday 7 July 2009 at the RCVS, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF (NB DWEL and DVO have different dates and candidates will be notified separately).

The precise timetable for each Diploma and Certificate subject will shortly be published on RCVSonline, and each candidate will be notified separately. Dates for clinical, oral and practical examinations will be published and notified to each candidate separately.

## Closing deadlines

### Certificates ('old style')

The closing date for applications for Final Approval of Experience for those enrolled under the old-style RCVS Certificates is 2 November 2009. If you are already enrolled, but have not received your Final Approval of Experience, you must apply for Final Approval by this date at the latest, if you wish to take the examination in 2010. You will need to submit your Form E2 and up-to-date *CPD Record Cards* and, in some subjects, your submitted work or case-logs. Please refer to the B2 Specific Guidance Notes for your subject ([www.rcvs.org.uk/certificates](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/certificates)).

### Diplomas

The closing date for applications for enrolment and/or Final Approval of Experience is 2 November 2009. If you're enrolling for the first time for a Diploma, or applying for your Final Approval of Experience in order to take the examination in 2010, your application must be received by this date at the latest. You will need to submit your Form E2, plus up-to-date *CPD Record Cards*. See [www.rcvs.org.uk/diplomas](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/diplomas) for more details.

## Fellowship

The deadline for new applications for the RCVS Fellowship (by Thesis or by Meritorious Contributions to Learning) is 31 July 2009.

The RCVS Diploma of Fellowship is the College's oldest and most prestigious award.

It is awarded following examination of a thesis, or following examination of a collection of the candidate's work to assess their 'meritorious contributions to learning' over a period of 15 years. The subject of a thesis may cover any topic, provided it relates to an "aspect of the art or science of veterinary medicine, whether clinical, experimental or otherwise, or may relate to the general development of the veterinary profession". The work must demonstrate originality and significantly advance knowledge of the subject. Further information about application procedures may be found at [www.rcvs.org.uk/fellowship](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/fellowship) or by contacting Janet Etheridge on 020 7202 0701 or [j.etheridge@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:j.etheridge@rcvs.org.uk).

## RCVS Recognised Specialist status

Friday 21 August 2009 is the deadline for re-applications for Specialists who first listed in 1995, 2000 and 2005.

Friday 11 September 2009 is the deadline for new applications

## Emeritus RCVS Recognised Specialist

It has recently been agreed that RCVS Recognised Specialists who have been listed for at least 15 years and wish to retire from employment as a Specialist may be considered for Emeritus RCVS Recognised Specialist status. The title of Emeritus RCVS Recognised Specialist may be conferred on those Recognised Specialists who are retired from active employment but who are deserving of recognition of past merit. Recognised Specialists who no longer wish to be included in the RCVS List should indicate whether they wish to be considered for Emeritus status. Emeritus Recognised Specialists may still be involved in their specialty, but would not be expected to work as a Specialist and would not be available for referral consultations. In order to avoid confusion regarding this status, it will only be available to those who are on the non-practising Register.

# EMS review - recommendations

## Working Party reports and consultation opens

**T**he RCVS has been undertaking a review of its requirements for Extra-Mural Studies (EMS), which has formed an essential part of the veterinary training for over 70 years. Through a Working Party chaired by Dr Barry Johnson, the College invited views on EMS earlier this year and during April held four days of meetings with a wide range of veterinary associations, individuals and the universities, before framing its initial proposals, which are now out for consultation.

From the comments received so far, there's wide consensus about the enormous value of EMS – not only in terms of its contribution to the training of students, but also to the profession more generally. There's a widespread view that EMS is the 'jewel in the crown' of UK veterinary education and must be nurtured. The Working Party received many suggestions as to how delivery of EMS could be improved to meet 21st century standards, and its proposals cover areas where it's felt there's a need to tighten up. However, it's suggested that the current general aims and the time spent on EMS remain valid.



### Communication pays

A message that has come across repeatedly from the initial consultation has been about the importance of communication between all the various parties involved with EMS. There's already plenty of guidance and information out there, with EMS guides for students and practices, but it sounds as if it's not reaching those who need it. There's a need for better communication between students, universities, practices and other placement providers, if EMS is to work well for everyone. The Working Party has made recommendations for all the main players and is inviting views from all involved before presenting its final report to the RCVS Education Policy and Specialisation Committee in October.

The Working Party's proposals stress that students must take responsibility for their own learning during EMS. This includes preparing properly before each placement and setting learning objectives in consultation with their university tutors. Students should check that their placement provider has all the relevant paperwork and guidance about EMS and, if they haven't, give them a copy. They must keep their EMS log-books up to date and ensure that their attitude and behaviour whilst on EMS reflects the professional status to which they aspire.

***“Practices should be encouraged to provide honest feedback to and about the student.”***

Universities need to allocate sufficient staff resources to ensure that EMS is administered and students' EMS records are monitored effectively. Work may also be needed to develop EMS recording systems across the universities. It's also suggested that they should consider offering EMS providers discounted access to continuing professional development (CPD) and other services provided by the university. Many students have financial difficulties exacerbated by their EMS commitments, and universities will be asked to explore the possibility of defining parts of the course as a 'long course' which may help some students take advantage of increased student loans.

### Feedback

The Working Party also suggests that practices and other EMS placement providers should identify named individuals to act as the EMS contact for students and the university, and that some time is set aside for entry and exit interviews with students at the beginning and end of each placement. This simple mechanism could help to make the placement



more productive for both the practice and the student. Furthermore, practices should be encouraged to provide honest feedback to and about the student, and should contact the university's EMS coordinator if they want to discuss a particular student in more detail.

One of the proposals that the Working Party hopes will find support is for students to be allowed more flexibility in their choice of EMS placements. Not all universities have taken advantage of the flexibility that is contained in the current RCVS guidance on EMS, and many still stipulate the number of weeks to be covered by all students across particular species. This can lead to a climate of 'box-ticking', with students attending placements merely to meet the requirements: this can be of questionable educational value.

### Competences

Students must gain experience across all the major species to meet their Day One

### Aims of Extra-Mural Studies

Work placements should be undertaken in a range of veterinary-related contexts to allow students to gain an appreciation of the breadth of the veterinary role and how veterinary medicine and science operates in 'real-life' and commercial environments. Specifically, placements should enable students to:

- gain an understanding of the practice and economics of animal management systems
- gain an understanding of practice economics and practice management
- acquire an understanding of medical and surgical treatments in a variety of species
- develop communication skills for all aspects of veterinary work
- expand their experience to those disciplines and species not fully covered within the university
- appreciate the importance of animal welfare in animal production and in the practice of veterinary medicine
- gain experience to help them appreciate the ethical responsibilities of the veterinary surgeon in relation to individual clients, animals, the community and society.



Competences, but this needn't necessarily be through EMS. Universities must take responsibility for delivering the Day One Competences, and where these need to be covered in placements outside the university, these should be seen as part of the core curriculum and quality-assured accordingly, just like any other part of the intra-mural course. EMS, on the other hand, is there to help students gain additional experience in 'real life' working environments, to complement what is taught at university. It's proposed that students should spend more time in a 'base' practice where they can return at varying times throughout their 4th and 5th year: this could help them build up a relationship with the practice, and mean they can be more useful to the practice than those who only attend for isolated two-week slots.

***"EMS is the 'jewel in the crown' of UK veterinary education."***

Recognising the crucial importance of public health in the course, the Working Party has also proposed that abattoir experience should be moved out of EMS and back into the core curriculum, with the universities responsible for coordinating visits.

If you'd like to read and comment on the Working Party's EMS proposals in more detail, please visit RCVSonline at [www.rcvs.org.uk/ems](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/ems). The deadline is Friday 4 September, and comments should be addressed to Freda Andrews, Head of Education, at [f.andrews@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.andrews@rcvs.org.uk).

#### Working Party's recommendations at a glance:

- Need for better communication between all parties
- Students must take responsibility for their EMS learning
- Universities to ensure students' records are monitored effectively
- Recording systems to be developed across universities
- Some parts of courses may be designated 'long course' so students can access increased loans
- Practices should carry out entry and exit interviews with students
- Students to be allowed more flexibility in their choice of EMS placements
- Students should spend more time in a 'base' practice
- Abattoir experience should be moved out of EMS and back into the core curriculum.

## IV training

### Successful IV Standardisation Days

**We hosted one of our Standardisation Days for veterinary nursing Internal Verifiers (IVs) at the end of May at Bridgwater College in Somerset. The day began with a presentation about the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) given by Scheme Inspector, Sue Chorlton, who provided an insight into how the PSS integrates with Training Practice status and what is considered during an inspection.**

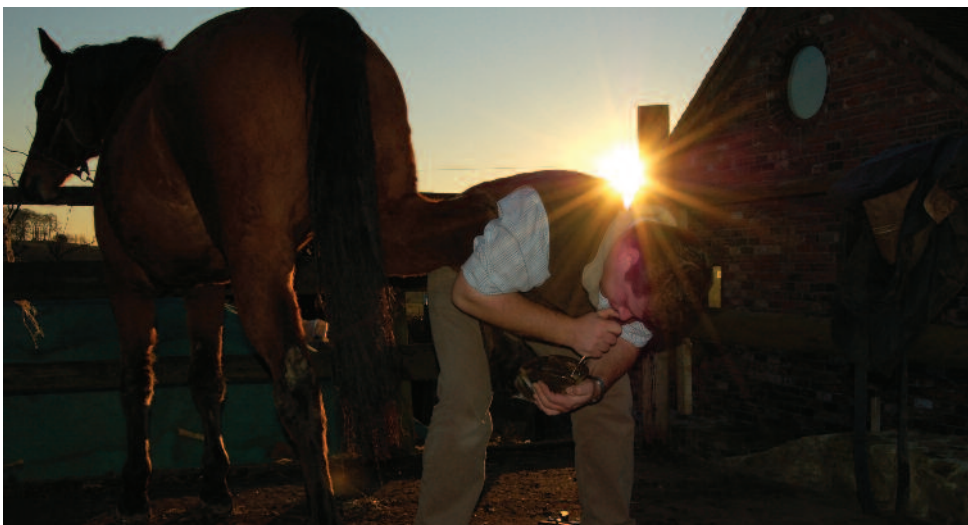
The IVs then rotated through three 45-minute workshops, including communication with the our Veterinary Nursing team, professional

discussion and witness testimonies. The day closed with an open forum discussing future changes to the awards. Feedback from the event was very positive, with delegates enjoying the new workshop approach.

There are two more events in 2009, at Hadlow College in Kent, on 21 July, and at Newcastle College on 29 October. Hadlow is now fully booked but there are places left at Newcastle. For more information, contact [vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk).

## It's a shoe-in

### New EMS placements in farriery



**The Worshipful Company of Farriers (WCF) is planning to offer seven one-week Extra-Mural Studies placements with Master Farriers for senior veterinary undergraduates with a particular interest in equine studies. The WCF has established a panel of highly qualified and respected Liverymen farriers in various parts of the country, as well as farriers at the Royal Army Veterinary Corps' Army School of Farriery at Melton Mowbray, to act as placement hosts.**

The WCF is writing to the seven UK veterinary schools to outline the scheme and will be inviting each of them to nominate one of their students to take up a placement in the 2010 summer vacation. The WCF is generously

meeting the costs of students' travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses, so there will be no financial barriers to prevent an able student from making the most of this opportunity. In addition, students who complete their placements satisfactorily will be offered admission to the Freedom of the Company without initial entry charge and annual membership subscription until they are 25.

The WCF, whose origins can be traced back to 1356, will be coordinating the scheme, which will be reviewed after its first year. It hopes the initiative will further cement its relationship with equine interests within the veterinary profession.

#### EMS scholarships awarded

Ten veterinary undergraduates are to receive EMS scholarship funds of around £1,000 each from the RCVS Trust. These funds are intended to help with the costs of research projects that meet EMS requirements, and can be used to pay for travel, accommodation and similar expenses in the UK or overseas.

## Meet the RCVS team



### Richard Holford

#### What's your role?

Head of Corporate Services

#### What's your background?

I began work in Local Government Finance Departments in the early '80s. As computer systems became more widely available, I was involved in their implementation and became interested in computer applications. I studied with the Association of Computer Professionals and the Open University, and was Head of IT at a Housing Association and The British Film Institute before joining the RCVS.

#### What do you do?

I manage the Corporate Services Department and the relationships we have with various third-party organisations who provide software, hardware support, printing services and maintenance activities. Development of strategy and planning future developments and investment, especially where information technology is concerned, is a key part of my role. As Corporate Services is a small department, I can also be found crawling under desks plugging in cables, setting up systems or fixing computers, printers and photocopiers.

I am responsible for most of the support services for the College. My main interest and expertise is in IT, but we are responsible for many other important activities, including reception services, incoming and outgoing mail and producing the *Register of Members* and *Directory of Veterinary Practices*.

#### What's been your biggest challenge?

Keeping our current database system working and capable of meeting our changing needs while we identify and implement a new system.

#### Surprise us...

I have completed four London Marathons, escaped from Colditz (the gate was stuck), and recently performed at a festival on the same bill as Nick Heyward, Rolf Harris and, er, Timmy Mallet.

## All welcome at RCVS Day

### Walk on the wild-side at One Great George Street



**RCVS Day – our AGM and awards presentation – will take place on Friday 3 July 2009. Following a successful day last year, we will again be holding the event at One Great George Street, Westminster, London.**

All Members and Listed/Registered Veterinary Nurses are welcome to attend the day, which will begin with the AGM at 10am, followed by the awards presentations at 11am. Coffee will be available from 9.30am-11am, and lunch will be served at 1pm in the Edwardian Great Hall.

As Jill Nute's last official engagement in her term of office as President of the RCVS, she will be welcoming fellow Cornish practitioner, Vic Simpson HonFRCVS, to give a talk entitled "Wildlife, my life, and some lessons of life".

The talk will follow a series of wildlife studies that Vic has made during his career, including lead poisoning in swans, effects of pollutants on otters and strandings of marine mammals. It will also highlight some of the factors that can operate against such studies and demonstrate the value of veterinary investigations in the conservation of wildlife, and how this work benefits society.

To apply for tickets for RCVS Day, which are free, please contact Fiona Harcourt on 020 7202 0773 or [f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk), by 19 June.

More information, including an agenda, minutes of last year's AGM and directions to the venue, are available in the RCVS Day booklet in this mailing.

## Putting you in the picture

### Your RCVS Review is enclosed – comments please!

**Spot anything slightly odd accompanying this issue of *RCVS News*? A man with the head of a chameleon, perhaps, or a goat wearing overalls? If so, no need to worry that you're not getting enough sleep...it was just the 2009 edition of the *RCVS Review*, and our latest ruse to attract people's attention.**

Nevertheless, the people on the cover do all have an RCVS-related story to tell – no models or actors here – so please spend a few minutes reading what they have to say about the RCVS and how our activities over the past 12 months have affected them. You may well have some experiences in common.

Shomari Lyon, third-year Bristol vet student, shares his views on the careers material we launched for school children in 2008 and which he helped to promote. Peter Aylmer, newly-appointed Veterinary Investigator for the Preliminary Investigation Committee, explains why he had to think twice before applying for the post. And Registered Veterinary Nurse Karen Langner admits to her fair share of pre-exam nerves but describes how the new e-exam system we implemented helped the whole ordeal pass more smoothly.

As per last year, when we first split our traditional annual report into two (which won

an award...did we mention that?), we have published and posted the *Review* to all registered Members and Listed/Registered Veterinary Nurses, but have published part 2 of the report, *RCVS Facts*, mainly online. Please visit [www.rcvs.org.uk/facts](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/facts) if you would like to indulge in some number crunching.

Whilst we hope you will enjoy this year's report, and find the contents interesting, we would like to hear your views whatever they may be. To that end, please fill in and return the reader survey that you will find at the back of the *Review*, or complete it online at [www.rcvs.org.uk/reviewfeedback](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/reviewfeedback). Thank you.





# Entertaining Mr Bone

## Kids devise pet toys in careers competition

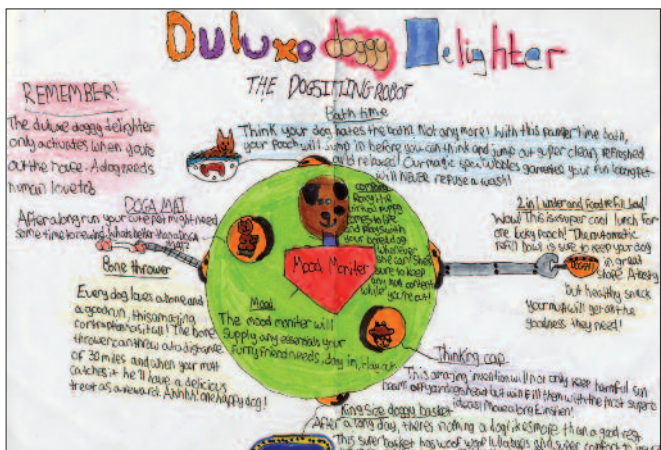
**The Animal Welfare Act says that owners must ensure their animals have a suitable environment and the ability to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.**

What does that really mean? We asked the readers of *National Geographic Kids* (NGK) magazine to think about their pets' behaviour in the home environment by inventing a toy to

entertain a pet left home-alone during the day. The entries showed a great deal of imagination in looking at what their pets like, and need, to do.

The winning entry, from Susannah, aged 11, in London, was a dog-sitting robot called the 'Deluxe doggy delighter' which entertains the stay-at-home pet with a 'bone thrower', a 'thinking cap' to produce great ideas, automatic food and water re-fills and a pampering bath.

The competition was part of a feature we produced with NGK to help educate young readers about what it means to be a vet and the range of career options available – an extension of our 'Walks of life' careers campaign. Susannah's prize is to spend a day in a PDSA PetAid Hospital, and five runners up received a year's membership to the PDSA Pet Protectors Club.



# It's your College

## Come and visit us



If you want to know what goes on in your College, come and find out! We run open-days for small groups several times a year, offering you the chance to meet the Officer team and Heads of Department, and find out what we really do all day. We even pay for your (reasonable) travel expenses.

The next dates are 6 October and 8 December. To get on the guest list, contact Fiona Harcourt on [f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk) or 020 7202 0773.

# Questions in Cornwall

## We're all ears

**The RCVS Officers and VN Council members will be coming to Fraddon, Cornwall, on Thursday 18 June for RCVS Question Time - so get in touch now to book your place.**

We will be taking your questions, debating hot veterinary topics and offering information and guidance at the meeting, which will begin at 6.30pm with a bite to eat and a chance to catch up with colleagues, with the debate starting at 7.15pm. All veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses, practice managers and others involved in the profession are invited.

Questions are welcome on any veterinary topic and are expected to cover veterinary legislation, 24-hour cover, VN regulation and the Veterinary Practice Premises Register.

For further information and to book your place at the meeting, which will be held in the Kingsley Suite at Kingsley Village, Fraddon, please contact Fiona Harcourt on 020 7202 0773, [f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:f.harcourt@rcvs.org.uk).

### Preparing for an inspection?

There are still a few places left for the Practice Standards Scheme (PSS) 'surgery', taking place on Thursday 18 June, 11am-5pm at Kingsley Village.

For practices who are thinking of joining the Scheme, need some help with an upcoming inspection or simply want a one-to-one chat with an inspector, free 45-minute appointments will be available with President and Practice Standards Group Chairman, Jill Nute, or a PSS Inspector, to answer your questions.

To book a place, which will be on a first-come, first-served basis, please contact Fiona Harcourt via the details above.



# Discipline at Congress

## VNC Chairman presents

**As announced in the March issue, Liz Branscombe will take over from Andrea Jeffery as Chairman of the Veterinary Nurses Council on RCVS Day in July.**

Two of the major challenges facing VN Council during the year ahead will be the review and re-accreditation of the VN awards (see page 14) and preparing the profession for the introduction of the disciplinary system for Registered Veterinary Nurses, in autumn 2010.

To help VNs understand the impact of the disciplinary mechanism, and as one of her first formal roles as Chairman, Liz will make a presentation at this year's BVNA Congress entitled 'Professional Rights and Responsibilities: The Disciplinary System for RVNs'.

The VN team will also be present at BVNA Congress to take your questions on the new disciplinary system. Join us on Saturday 10 October, in the Kettering Conference Centre, Northants.

- Don't forget VN Week, from 19-25 July. Once again the BVNA is promoting a week of local and national events to educate the public on the diverse roles that nurses play, and the benefits they offer their patients, clients and the community at large. Visit <http://vnweek.wordpress.com> for more information.

# Lay Observers' Report 2009

Catherine Harvey, Chris Mattinson, Jane Ramsay

**P**reliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) meetings are carried out in the presence of three Lay Observers who provide valuable independent input. Each June, the Lay Observers report to Council, setting out their views on the year's activities and making recommendations for change. An edited version of this report appears below, together with responses from the PIC (to be read in conjunction with the last three PIC Chairman Reports).

This is the tenth annual report of the Lay Observers.

Since the last report, the rolling programme for the appointment of Lay Observers has continued. Diane Mark retired from the Committee during the year. Diane made an invaluable contribution to the work of the Committee over the years, playing an important part in developing the role of the Lay Observer and revising the complaints-handling procedures, and we would like to thank her for all her help. The Committee has since welcomed Catherine Harvey, who brings to the role a wide range of experience in the field of regulation.

## Revised complaints procedures

Since we last reported, the new complaints procedures have been successfully introduced. There is no doubt, in our view, that the revisions allow complaints to be investigated more effectively and speedily. The PIC Chairman reports regularly to Council on complaints handling and, when compared with many other regulatory bodies, the College's performance in this important area of regulation is favourable.

The introduction of a Lay Observer and a veterinary surgeon acting independently as Case Examiners (once the veterinary surgeon has responded to the complaint) has been a particularly successful addition to the procedures. A greater number of complaints (currently approximately 80%) which do not meet the threshold of an arguable case of serious professional misconduct are now closed earlier than under the former arrangement. Full reasons for the decisions taken by the Case Examiners are given and, in appropriate cases, advice may also be given to the veterinary surgeon who is the subject of the complaint. Clearly, members of the public and veterinary surgeons want decisions on complaints to be dealt with in good time and with the same quality of scrutiny, irrespective of whether the complaint is referred to the Committee for consideration or not. This particular initiative helps us to meet that objective.

We welcome the creation of a team of Investigators to support the work of the Committee. The Investigators, by meeting complainants and by visiting veterinary surgeons to conduct interviews at their practices (then reporting back on their findings), have enabled the Committee to reach more robust evidence-based decisions in appropriate cases.

Significant progress has been made by the College in producing data and statistical analysis about complaints. The Committee receives reports at its monthly meetings that enable it to evaluate its overall performance against key targets.

We welcome the raised awareness by the College of using data coming out of the complaints-handling procedures to inform policy and to encourage good practice within the profession. As in previous years, the majority of complaints revolve around allegations of negligence, misdiagnosis, poor communications and poor handling of the death of an animal. There is plenty of evidence that practices are learning from complaints made by members of the public and are thus reviewing their clinical governance arrangements and standard operating procedures, addressing staff training and development needs, and improving their communications. We welcome this approach.

Clearly, in a very competitive environment, it makes good business sense (and more importantly, helps to maintain the good reputation of the profession) if veterinary surgeons respond constructively to complaints made against them, making improvements in the light of their experience.

## PIC responds...

The Preliminary Investigation Committee is grateful for the Lay Observers' comments and their work throughout the development and introduction of the revised complaints procedures. The Committee is mindful of the current limited jurisdiction the RCVS has over complaints against veterinary surgeons, when compared to many healthcare regulators, but considers that complaints are robustly investigated and decided fairly within the existing legislation and the complaints procedure.

There has been further development of the complaints procedures during the year, as demonstrated by formalising the role of veterinary surgeon Investigators and developing computer software both to provide RCVS staff, Committee members and Lay Observers with online access to complaints information from

home, and enable the RCVS to gather data about the complaints process.

The development is ongoing and there is planned introduction of a health protocol to enable the RCVS to deal compassionately and confidentially with those whose complaints primarily relate to medical conditions, rather than misconduct; while at the same time ensuring that referrals to the Disciplinary Committee are made if it is in the public interest.

## Induction training

The Lay Observers would like to make special mention of the excellent induction training given to new members of the Committee, both lay and veterinary. Equally successful was the two-day course designed to ensure that all Committee members became confident and competent in working with the new procedures. We were pleased to be consulted about the content of the training that was given.

As a result, part of the training delivered focused on the particular responsibilities of Lay Observers. These include bringing an independent scrutiny of complaints, articulating the voice of the public and making sure that the design and operation of the College's procedures are fair, robust and can command respect.

## PIC responds...

Induction and annual training is now a feature of the Committee's year, together with induction training for the Investigators, who were appointed this year after a formal appointment process.

Training is provided with the assistance of Penningtons Solicitors, who investigate complaints in conjunction with the RCVS legal team. Following on from the success of the training sessions, the RCVS prepared a fictional training case, trialled by the Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons (SPVS), to allow practising veterinary surgeons to experience the decision-making role of the Committee.

## New VSA needed

We support the College in its campaign to persuade Government that there is a need to reform the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966. The Lay Observers consider that, under the existing provisions, complaints about poor performance (and in particular the health of a veterinary surgeon when it affects his or her ability to practise) cannot be addressed effectively. The intention to separate the responsibility for setting professional standards from the College



# Report to Council June 2009

## PI Committee Chairman Lynne Hill

body responsible for investigating allegations of misconduct or poor performance etc is fully justified, and has our support.

There is no doubt that if the profession wishes to maintain its longstanding privilege to regulate its own affairs, then reform along the lines taken by the other healthcare regulators is urgently needed if public confidence is to be sustained.

### PIC responds...

With regard to a new Veterinary Surgeons Act, the Committee notes that at this time, the political will for a new Act appears to be lacking; it supports RCVS efforts to find other ways of taking forward, as a matter of priority, changes to key areas of the complaints and disciplinary system.

Access to relevant business premises and obtaining relevant documentation are important in any investigation system, and the Committee is pleased to report that, broadly, veterinary surgeons are cooperative with investigations, visits and interviews. If this were to change, it would be imperative that the RCVS seeks formal powers to access business premises and obtain relevant documentation.

The Committee will continue to review its procedures to ensure that it can protect the public interest within the existing reactive complaints-based legislation and, by doing so, benefit the profession.

### Vote of thanks

During the last 12 months there has been substantial change in the way the College handles its complaints. We would like to congratulate the Committee Chairman and the Head of the Professional Conduct Department and his team for leading this major agenda for change with such professionalism and thoroughness.

Finally, we would like to thank all members of the Professional Conduct Department and other members of the College's staff for their most able help and support for the Lay Observers, which is so willingly and cheerfully given.



Catherine Harvey, Chris Mattinson, Jane Ramsay



**T**here have been three meetings of the Preliminary Investigation Committee (PIC) since the last Council meeting, during which 28 new complaints, as well as ongoing complaints, were considered. In that time, the PI Committee has:

- referred two complaints to solicitors for statements;
- requested further investigation by the Professional Conduct Department for five complaints;
- carried out four announced and three unannounced visits to veterinary practices (which involved interviewing complainants, veterinary surgeons and witnesses, and assisting Police and Trading Standards with investigation into, and enforcement against, non-veterinary surgeons); and,
- referred one complaint to the Disciplinary Committee.

A case related to the administration of Metacam was reported to Council.

### Case-study: off-label administration or supply

The complaint concerned an allegation that a veterinary surgeon prescribed Metacam (meloxicam, a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug) without warning of its potential side-effects, for example, that its use is contraindicated in pregnant or lactating animals and that it can increase renal toxicity.

The client/complainant took a pregnant bitch to the veterinary surgeon, because there had been no movement of the puppy for some hours. A caesarean section was carried out and, during the procedure, Metacam was administered intravenously. A single puppy was delivered. The surgery was uneventful and the bitch was discharged approximately thirty minutes after waking.

Two days later, another veterinary surgeon at the practice examined the bitch. The complainant reported that the bitch was off her food, had not eaten since previously vomiting and was generally lethargic. Blood samples were taken, the results of which were unremarkable.

Following concern that the bitch was deteriorating, the vet advised that the bitch might have a 'hangover' from the anaesthesia and to return in two days' time. After further deterioration the following night, the veterinary surgeon decided that referral was appropriate; renal failure was diagnosed by the referral practice, which the complainant considered was due to the administration of Metacam.

The Committee considered the use of Metacam in these circumstances was reasonable, but was concerned that apparently no explanation had been given to the owner about the risks involved. It considered that written consent was advisable, which could be communicated on the consent form for the procedure. However, PIC decided the complaint could not amount to serious professional misconduct affecting fitness to practise and closed the complaint.

The veterinary surgeon was advised accordingly; noting he had accepted the complaint and reviewed the relevant practice protocol. The owner was informed that an allegation of negligence, which he had raised, had to be decided between the parties or in the civil courts.

### Other updates

Council was also updated on the work of the recently-appointed PIC Investigators and the training courses that were held for them in June (see page 6 for more detail); on ongoing discussions with the Veterinary Defence Society about announced and unannounced visits; and on developing new protocols and procedures for health-related cases.

The full report is available on RCVSonline at [www.rcvs.org.uk/pic](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/pic).

## Mr Joseph Holmes

**Resumed Inquiry concerning: administering treatment with insufficient knowledge; inappropriate dispensing of medicines; failing to obtain informed consent**

**DC Decision: final postponement of judgment for 18 months; undertakings given**

On 1 May 2009, following a two-day hearing, the Disciplinary Committee (DC) accepted a wide-ranging 18-month programme of undertakings from Mr Joseph Holmes designed to address his "serious deficiencies" and "practice failings". On this basis, judgment against Mr Holmes was postponed for a final period of 18 months.

Back in October 2006, Mr Holmes was found guilty of four charges of serious professional misconduct. These involved: his treatment of a Labrador, which he diagnosed with suspected bone cancer (it was subsequently found to have osteoarthritis), with particular reference to his 'cavalier use of chemotherapy in the absence of a proper knowledge of the subject'; dispensing cytotoxic drugs in a plastic bag; and, lack of informed consent to treatment by the owner. At that time, judgment was postponed for a period of two years, subject to undertakings agreed by Mr Holmes.

The hearing resumed early, in February 2008, as Mr Holmes had deliberately ceased to comply with these undertakings in the hope of forcing an appeal against the Committee's original finding of serious professional misconduct. At this, Mr Holmes was told there was no legal framework for such an appeal (only against a sanction of suspension or removal from the Register) and that he would be subject to a further 18-month period of compliance with the conditions set out at the original hearing. He was also invited to propose a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) and other undertakings for that period.

As Mr Holmes then applied for a Judicial Review of the Committee's decisions, this programme was never proposed. However, at the Royal Courts of Justice in October 2008, Mr Holmes' application for Judicial Review was stayed, by mutual consent, allowing the DC hearing to be resumed. At this, the Committee reminded itself of the original four findings of serious professional misconduct against Mr Holmes, which, in each case, it had stated would "be viewed by reasonable and competent members of the veterinary profession to be deplorable...and far below the standards that members of the public were entitled to expect."

In relation to these findings, the Committee was particularly concerned about his deficiencies in the fields of orthopaedics, oncology, radiology and therapeutics, and considered that his future CPD should specifically address these areas over and above the programme of CPD expected of every veterinary surgeon.

Consequently, Mr Holmes agreed to an extensive range of undertakings over an 18-month period, including: participation in the RCVS Practice Standards Scheme (including two inspections); keeping abreast of changes to the RCVS Guide to Professional Conduct; 105 hours in total of CPD (half of which to relate to the specific areas of deficiency identified); proof of purchase of up-to-date text books and journal subscriptions; and, six-monthly progress reports to the DC Chairman.

Brian Jennings, Chairman of the Committee, said: "The Committee considers that the undertakings in the form that you have offered to it, if fulfilled by you, will serve to ensure that there will be no repetition of the conduct which resulted in our original findings and serve to ensure that animals and the public will not be put at risk.

"We trust that you will enter into these courses with the right mind-set and find that at their conclusion, these tasks have been of advantage to your practice."

## Mr Kfir Segev

**Resumed Inquiry concerning: dishonest representation of radiographs and recommendation of unnecessary diagnostic work.**

**DC decision: remove name from Register.**

On 19 May 2009, the Disciplinary Committee (DC) directed that Kfir Segev, of the Medivet practice in Stanmore, London, should be removed from the Register, having found him guilty of serious professional misconduct for deliberately concealing from his clients that their dog was terminally ill, whilst at the same time recommending that she undergo expensive and unnecessary procedures. The Inquiry, which began in November 2008, resumed in March 2009, and resumed again in May, lasted for nine days.

The Committee heard how, in November 2006, Mr Segev had been asked to treat Zoe, a greyhound lurcher, as she was completely lame on one leg and appeared to be in great pain. Mr Segev had not been the owners' usual veterinary surgeon; indeed, Zoe had undergone treatment for a jaw tumour at a different practice the previous year. Zoe was admitted

for pain relief and further investigation, including blood samples and radiographs, and hospitalised overnight.

***"We entirely accept that unequal power exists between the veterinary surgeon and the client, and it behoves the veterinary surgeon to exercise that power in a true, wise and proportionate manner."***

She received acupuncture the following day and, after a consultation between her owners and Mr Segev that evening, was then sent home, apparently pain-free. Still showing occasional distress the next day, Zoe was hospitalised again for further assessment, before returning home again that evening. The owners were, however, clear in their evidence that, over the course of several subsequent conversations with Mr Segev, he told them that there was no recurrence of the cancer from the previous year, and recommended Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans and taking Fine Needle Aspirates (FNA).

Having become unhappy with Mr Segev's treatment, advice and the cost of the recommended treatment, the owners then decided to return to their usual veterinary surgeon. Examining the radiographs Mr Segev himself had taken, a diagnosis of metastatic neoplasia was immediately made, an opinion that was subsequently confirmed by an oncology specialist who recommended palliative care until euthanasia became necessary.

The Committee had to decide, firstly, whether Mr Segev was aware of the condition of Zoe's lungs from the radiographs he took and, if so, whether he deliberately and dishonestly withheld this information from her owners; and, secondly, whether Mr Segev had recommended Zoe undergo an MRI scan and FNA and, if so, whether he knew that this was unnecessary and/or would not promote Zoe's welfare.

The Committee noted Mr Segev's evidence that he had recognised tumours shown in his own x-rays, and that Zoe's condition was terminal, and that he had discussed this with the owners personally at the end of a lengthy consultation when Zoe's leg pain and lameness were discussed. This contrasted



# The Trichomonad strain

## Trust funding helps track garden bird parasite

**D**NA can be key to many a crime scene, and its use in court is not without its attendant controversies. However, when the Trichomonad parasite started to attack British finches, the case for DNA investigation was clear cut. Becki Lawson, wildlife vet at the Institute of Zoology, Zoological Society of London, approached the RCVS Trust for help and was granted £5,000 to research the different strains in an effort to detect where the parasite had come from – and how to tackle it.

“We first picked up cases of infection in British finches in 2005,” says Becki, who is carrying out her research as part of a wider Garden Bird Health initiative involving the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare, the British Trust for Ornithology, the RSPB, other disease investigation centres and the garden bird food industry. “In 2006 and 2007, it had reached epidemic proportions – although we cannot say exactly what percentage of finches was affected.”

During the recent outbreak, the parasite seems mainly to affect greenfinches and chaffinches, although house sparrows and other species

have also been infected. Historically, trichomonosis is well known as a cause of disease in pigeons and doves, where it is known as ‘canker’, and in birds of prey, where the condition is called ‘frounce’. Budgerigars can also be affected by the parasite. “One theory is that it has been spread from wild pigeons or doves to finches, perhaps through shared food and water sources,” says Becki, although she stresses that until the research is concluded it is premature to speculate.

Trichomonosis is widespread geographically throughout the UK, although it is seasonal in nature – disease outbreaks typically start after the breeding season and continue until mid-autumn. Affected birds have lesions on the mucosa of the oesophagus and crop which obstruct the upper digestive tract. There is no effective treatment for wild birds and good hygiene practices in feeding garden birds is recommended by the Garden Bird Health initiative to help prevent transmission between infected birds.

“Unlike other diseases, such as salmonellosis, that are endemic amongst British wild birds,



Greenfinch, courtesy Jill Pakenham/BTO

our understanding of the epidemiology of trichomonosis as an emerging threat to finches is limited,” says Becki, who hopes that her work will mean better advice can be given and action taken to halt the spread of the parasite.

To report sick or dead garden birds to the Garden Bird Health initiative, you can call 0207 449 6685 or email [ufaw@ufaw.org.uk](mailto:ufaw@ufaw.org.uk). Further information is available at [www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php](http://www.ufaw.org.uk/gbhi.php).

starkly with the owners’ account that Mr Segev had dismissed the details showing on the x-rays as ‘old scar tissue’.

The Committee rejected Mr Segev’s version of events as “wholly incredible”, preferring the owners’ evidence. The Committee was also “astonished” that, knowing the dog’s condition, Mr Segev would embark on a long explanation of the bony anatomy of the dog and possible causes of leg pain (which was already resolving with analgesia and rest), before explaining to the owners that the earlier cancer had spread and Zoe’s condition was hopeless. This “obvious and overwhelming diagnosis” had not been recorded in the contemporaneous clinical records which instead “focused on examinations, procedures, tests and medication for which charges could be made”. The only reference to lung lesions appeared to have been added later.

After carefully considering all the evidence before it, the DC found the first allegation proved, in that Mr Segev lied to Zoe’s owners about the recurrence of her cancer by dishonestly representing the radiographs that he took of her chest.

The second allegation, that he did in fact know the additional diagnostic work he recommended was unnecessary and would not promote Zoe’s welfare, was also found proved. Mr Segev’s contention that he was simply responding to the owners request for further information and possible tests to diagnose Zoe’s condition was therefore rejected. Expert witnesses for the College stated there was no point in subjecting a dog with terminal cancer to FNAs and MRI scans, the latter being an “eccentric proposal”.

In view of the Committee’s findings, Mr Segev himself then admitted that he was guilty of serious professional misconduct, a viewpoint with which the Committee unanimously agreed, stating: “We take the view that Mr Segev’s conduct amounted to a serious dereliction of the fundamental duty of trust between a veterinary surgeon and his clients. The reputation of the profession is inextricably linked to its approach to financial matters, and trust is easily lost when there is abusive behaviour. Mr Segev was guilty of such behaviour.”

Announcing the Committee’s decision on sanction, DC Committee Chairman Mrs Alison

Bruce said: “We entirely accept that unequal power exists between the veterinary surgeon and the client, and it behoves the veterinary surgeon to exercise that power in a true, wise and proportionate manner.

“We have found Mr Segev to have been deliberately dishonest, not only with his clients, but with the College and this Committee. In so acting, he has betrayed the owners’ trust, brought the profession into disrepute, and his recommended course of treatment would potentially have jeopardised the welfare of an animal entrusted to his care.

“We are not persuaded that the sanction of suspension is sufficient to uphold the good name of the profession and protect the public interest.”

Mrs Bruce then directed that Mr Kfir Segev be removed from the Register.

**Full details of disciplinary hearings are available at [www.rcvs.org.uk/disciplinary](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/disciplinary)**

# RCVS News at a glance...

Too busy to read the lot? Start here for important dates for your diary and story summaries, so you can decide what might be worth reading in full.

## 1 Money in the bank

Council agrees to freeze retention fees – plus online payments coming soon.

## 2 Keep taking the medicine

VMD survey results.

### What's in a name?

Sandy Trees defines a vet at BVA Congress.

## 3 Turn-out – nice again!

Voting figures up for RCVS and VN Council elections – three new faces.

### Contractually speaking

BVA campaign helps young vets get contracts.

## 4 Double trouble

Police warn of web-cloning risks.

### Racing certainty

Join the Trust's fund-raising team at the London 10k on 12 June.

### No lame duck

Dr Sue Dyson to deliver Share Jones Lecture on diagnosing lameness.

## 5 Booked out

Trust helps Rothschilds with Library loan.

### Boarding times

New Board for FVE.

## 6 Running it up the flag pole

We are soon to consult on new PSS standards.

### Changed priorities ahead

Council agrees new priorities for legislative changes.

## 7 Emergency solutions

Meeting convened to discuss tackling 24/7.

## 8 Advisory role

Who to turn to if you need to talk.

### Newly-minted advice

New Advice Note for overseas polo vets.

## 9 Hive of activity

We've been busy with VMD on new bee medicine advice.

## 10 Advanced skills

We talk to candidates on the DipAVN.

## 11 Euro-vision

An overview of EAEVE's mission to evaluate European education.

## 12 Home truths

How overseas vets see UK practice.

## 14 Virtual portfolios

New VN e-portfolios get thumbs up in pilot.

### No more NVQs?

Major review of VN qualifications – your views please!

## 16 What's in store for EMS?

Working Party makes recommendations: have your say.

## 17 Hoofing about

New EMS placements with farriers.

## 18 Meet the team

Meet the Head of Corporate Services: he mingles with the rich and famous – and crawls under your desk.

### Reviewing the Review

Tell us what you think about the *RCVS Review*.

## 19 Meetings galore

Plenty of chances to meet the team – hope to see you soon.

## 20 Critical observations

PI Lay Observers' Report – good progress made.

## 21 PI Committee

Case involving inadequate explanation of side-effects.

## 22 DC cases

Mr J Holmes' inquiry resumed – further postponement of 18 months, with undertakings; Mr K Segev struck off for dishonesty and recommending unnecessary treatment.

## 23 Trust taking the strain

Tracking a bird parasite with Trust funding.

## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

### 18 June

Regional Question Time, Cornwall

### 3 July

RCVS Day

### 7 July

Diploma written exams

### 21 and 22 July

Certificate written exams

### 31 July

Fellowship application deadline

### 21 August

Recognised Specialist re-application deadline

### 4 September

EMS consultation closes

### 11 September

Recognised Specialist application deadline

### 24-26 September

BVA Congress

### 6 October

Meet the RCVS Day

### 9-11 October

BVNA Congress

### 2 November

Deadline for Final Approval of Experience for Certificates and Diplomas

### 5 November

Council meeting

### 24 November

Share Jones Lecture

### 8 December

Meet the RCVS Day



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