

# RCVS news

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*Text-only version of  
RCVS News email*

# College welcomes call to add vets to Shortage Occupation List

We have welcomed a recommendation made by the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which provides advice on immigration issues to the Home Office, that veterinary surgeons should be added to the Shortage Occupation List.

The RCVS made a submission to the MAC in conjunction with the British Veterinary Association (BVA) as part of the MAC's review into the Shortage Occupation List, which began in autumn 2018. Professions on the list are prioritised for visas required to live and work in the UK. Further, employers wishing to hire professionals on the list are not required to complete the Resident Labour Market Test, meaning they would not have to advertise vacancies locally before offering the role to an employee from overseas.

The submission focused on the need for the UK immigration system to recognise that the veterinary workforce is already under capacity and that this problem is likely to be exacerbated after Brexit. This is due to the potential for increased demand for veterinary surgeons in areas such as export certification, and also the likelihood that fewer veterinary surgeons from the European Union will be joining the Register. It also reiterated the importance of veterinary surgeons in areas such as public health, food safety, disease surveillance and control, as well as education, research, clinical practice and animal welfare.

Commenting on the MAC's response, RCVS President Amanda Boag said: "We are very pleased to see that our submission, made with our colleagues at the BVA, has been welcomed by the Committee and that this recommendation will now be going to the key decision-makers at the Home Office for consideration. While we are still unaware of how the process of the UK leaving the EU will pan out, this is a very important step in ensuring the future security of the profession and mitigating against worsening workforce shortages.

"We would reiterate to the Government that the UK is currently reliant on overseas registrants to meet the demand for veterinary surgeons, with veterinary surgeons from the rest of the EU making up around 50% of new registrants each year. By adding veterinary surgeons to the Shortage Occupation List, and therefore reducing the immigration requirements needed to live and work in the UK, the Government will be helping ensure vital veterinary work continues to be done particularly in areas such as food safety and public health."

The RCVS will also be continuing to work with the BVA, the Department for the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs and the veterinary schools to look at how the number of 'home-grown' veterinary surgeons can be increased through expanding the UK veterinary education sector, increasing retention rates within the profession, and looking at how the veterinary team could be reformed to allow allied professionals, such as veterinary nurses, to utilise their full range of skills and knowledge by taking on extra tasks and freeing up veterinary time.

The RCVS also made a separate submission to the MAC asking for the veterinary nursing profession to be added to the Shortage Occupation List. The submission recognises that VNs are a crucial part of the vet-led team and that therefore it should be made easier for employers to recruit overseas VNs. This would help to address VN workforce shortages and facilitate appropriate delegation by veterinary surgeons enabling veterinary surgeon time to be focussed on tasks that are restricted to them.

In the veterinary nurse submission the RCVS also recommended that veterinary employers be exempt from the Immigration Skills Charge, in order to avoid any additional barriers or burdens to veterinary nursing employment, and that there be no minimum earning cap for veterinary nurses applying for working visas. Veterinary nurses are skilled professionals who may choose to work in the UK for reasons other than remuneration. Further, VN salaries are often considerably lower than the existing and proposed wage cap. The report confirms that the MAC will not be recommending to the Home Office that VNs are added to the Shortage Occupation List. The RCVS will continue to look at ways in which it can help the supply of veterinary nurses meet current demand for their services in the veterinary sphere.

To view the joint submission in full please visit [www.rcvs.org.uk/brexit](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/brexit) where you will also be able to find some of the supporting documents included in the submission.

# Over 220 VNs welcomed to the profession at registration ceremonies

Over 220 new veterinary nurses were welcomed to the VN profession at a series of ceremonies at ZSL London on Tuesday 7 May in which the achievements and skills of the profession were celebrated.

The ceremonies, which took place during this year's British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) Veterinary Nursing Awareness Month, saw newly-qualified veterinary nurses being formally welcomed to the profession and taken through their professional declarations by Racheal Marshall, Chair of our Veterinary Nurses Council. Furthermore, the event celebrated the achievements of six veterinary nurses who had achieved the Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing (DipAVN) and who also attended the day with their guests.

Speaking on the day Racheal said: "It is very apt that this ceremony is taking place during BVNA's VN Awareness Month, where veterinary practices are encouraged to talk to their clients and the wider public about who veterinary nurses are, what they do and why, as a caring profession, they are so important to animal health and welfare."

She added: "With VNs like you joining our profession or continuing to excel in your careers and helping to raise awareness of veterinary nursing amongst the general public, I am positive that we will continue to progress."

"You have had to work hard to get here today – by studying and passing exams, all whilst working in practice – which we all know can be very difficult at times."

"As veterinary nurses, you are a vital part of the veterinary team, working alongside your colleagues to ensure the health and welfare of your patients, and supporting clients in what can sometimes be very difficult and emotional decisions."

Racheal also gave three pieces of advice to the new registrants: accept that there will be change in your career and life, look after your own physical and mental wellbeing, and use your voice as a veterinary nurse by voicing your opinions and ideas, voting in VN Council elections – or even standing as a member – and contributing to the VN Futures project.

One particularly special element of the day was the recognition of Surrey-based veterinary nurse Sandra Robson for her long service with a veterinary nursing career spanning over 40 years.

Sandra, who now works part-time at Brelades Vets in Dorking, began her training in 1968 and qualified as a Registered Animal Nursing Assistant (or RANA) in August 1970. She has worked as a head nurse and practice manager at equine and small animal practices and has also been keen to pass on her experience to her peers being active in teaching and training many student veterinary nurses over the years.

Speaking of the day and the changes she'd seen in the profession over the course of her career Sandra said: "The people here should be proud of their profession because they have taken a long time to achieve their qualifications and they should be making everyone aware that it is an important achievement. There has been many general developments over the years with the introduction of the Register, the importance on veterinary nurses being professionally responsible for their own actions and Schedule 3."

Also attending the day was RCVS President Amanda Boag who presented each of the new veterinary nurses with a scroll containing the professional declaration made by all veterinary nurses on admission to the Register of Veterinary Nurses and formally welcoming them to the VN profession as an associate of the RCVS.

Speaking to the veterinary nurses on the day Amanda said: "As a veterinary surgeon, I am incredibly proud to work alongside your profession. I have been very lucky within my career to work with some amazing nurses, and I have learnt so much from being part of the wider veterinary team."

"As a young vet working in busy emergency clinics, it was very often the fantastic nurses I worked with who saved the day and were responsible for helping me save patients' lives. I couldn't have done it without them."

"Being a vet nurse is a wonderful vocation with great and increasing career opportunities and you are such an important part of the veterinary team."

The next VN Day ceremony takes place on Thursday 17 October 2019.

# RCVS plans roll-out of outcomes-based CPD model

The RCVS is planning to roll out a new outcomes-based model of continuing professional development (CPD) over the next few years, following a successful piloting process.

The recommendations on moving towards an outcomes-based model of CPD were made by the CPD Policy Working Party, our Education Committee and Veterinary Nurses Council and were given final consideration by RCVS Council during a confidential session of its meeting on 7 March. The paper was heard in confidential session because parts of it pertained to commercially-sensitive materials.

A shift towards a more outcomes-based model of CPD for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses has been under discussion for a number of years and one of its main proponents has been the current RCVS Senior Vice-President Professor Stephen May, who chaired the CPD Policy Working Party.

Regarding the concept, Stephen explained: "There has been increasing recognition over a range of different professions that CPD records based on 'inputs' alone, for example, measuring the number of hours attending a lecture, do not necessarily prove that any significant learning has taken place or that this learning will be used to improve professional practice.

"By contrast, research has demonstrated that CPD activities focused on outcomes encourage professionals to reflect on what they have learned, how they will apply their learning and how it will improve their practice, which has a positive impact on professionalism and patient health outcomes. Numerous other professions, including human medicine and dentistry, have moved to this model and the veterinary world has been somewhat 'behind the curve' as a result.

"However, as with any significant shift in policy, there has been a recognition that we needed to take the profession with us and not force through change. This is why, in March 2017, we launched a pilot scheme for the outcomes-based model with veterinary and veterinary nurse volunteers, including people who, during the initial consultation stage, had voiced some skepticism towards the concept.

"The overall feedback from volunteers was very positive and supportive towards the changes and I look forward, over the coming years, to talking to the professions at large about the benefits of the approach and how to best engage with the model."

"We will be building a new platform, consolidating all professional development-related capability for all members, into a single, integrated solution, seamlessly accessible via our 'My Account' online portal, and forthcoming mobile app."

In all, around 120 volunteers took part in the pilot, of whom 70% were veterinary surgeons and 30% veterinary nurses. When the pilot finished in October 2018, volunteers provided feedback as part of the evaluation process. Of the 57% of volunteers (n=70) who responded to the survey:

- 77% said they would be willing to use an outcomes-based CPD model in the future;
- 41% found it 'easy' or 'very easy' to implement outcomes-based CPD while only 11% thought it was either 'difficult' or 'very difficult';
- 61% thought that the outcomes-based model made CPD more meaningful for them and 25% said it encouraged them to undertake a wider range of CPD activities than previously;
- Other feedback included the need for a better CPD recording system and more information and guidance ahead of any future changes.

Following the feedback, particularly around the need for a new approach to CPD recording, it was also recommended to Council that a new online CPD recording system should be introduced. This system will integrate the current disparate systems, such as the Student Experience Log (for vet students), Nursing Progress Log (for student VNs) and the Professional Development Phase (for recent vet graduates), making it a 'one-stop shop' professional development recording platform.

Richard Burley, our Chief Technology Officer, explained: "We will be building a new platform, consolidating all professional development-related capability for all members, into a single, integrated solution, seamlessly accessible via our 'My Account' online portal, and forthcoming mobile app. We have assembled a new, dedicated, software development team to drive this work and more details about this system will be published in coming months."

Linda Prescott-Clements, our Director of Education, added: "Following the approval of the CPD proposals by RCVS

Council, a phased roll-out of the new model and the accompanying IT system will take place. This includes recruiting a group of volunteers from the profession later this year to get some initial feedback around the guidance resources and online CPD platform, with members of the profession being voluntarily able to sign up to the new model and IT system from January 2020 onwards.

“Implementation of the new CPD requirement for all members is expected to start in January 2022 but, prior to that, we will be working hard to talk to the profession about why an outcomes-based model is a more effective and meaningful way of undertaking CPD and this will include workshops, webinars and roadshows. Look out for more news on our plans over the coming months.”

More information about our current CPD policy can be found on our dedicated CPD page.

# VN Council approves new advanced veterinary nursing qualifications

At its May meeting RCVS Veterinary Nurses Council gave final approval to two new advanced veterinary nursing qualifications that would allow members of the profession at all stages of their career to develop their professional skills and knowledge in designated areas of practice.

The proposals for a new post-registration qualification framework for the profession grew out of a key recommendation of the VN Futures Report and Action Plan published in July 2016, which said that the joint RCVS and British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA) project should 'canvas opinion on the scope, level and delivery of post-qualification awards for veterinary nurses'. This would aim to open up more and different career paths for veterinary nurses.

The proposals were developed by a Post-registration Qualification Working Group and consulted on last summer. The consultation received a large number of responses from the profession which then fed into further revisions that were approved by the VN Education Committee in April.

VN Council approval was the final stage of the process which will now see two qualifications – a Level 6 Graduate Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing and a Level 7 Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing.

The two new qualifications differ from the previous Diploma in Advanced Veterinary Nursing in that the qualification is smaller, more focused (being a 60 credit qualification rather than an 120 credit one) and specific to the veterinary nurse's subject of choice, which makes it both more appealing and more manageable to fit around both professional and private life.

Commenting on the decision Racheal Marshall, Chair of VN Council, said: "This is a fantastic development for veterinary nursing in terms of professional development and showcasing the full range of skills and experience that we possess.

"The course criteria that we have approved have already received a great deal of interest from both Further and Higher Education providers. We hope to work constructively with them on developing their courses to ensure that they meet the standards we have set out and that they are maintained over time.

"By allowing greater focus on particular designated areas of practice I think these courses will really open up some significant opportunities for VNs, who can choose to go down a designated path, whether that is in, for example, anaesthesia, emergency & critical care, pharmacology or even non-clinical routes such as education and teaching, research skills and leadership.

"This is a great step forward for the profession and we look forward to working to develop the first Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing courses and seeing the first cohort of veterinary nurses sign-up to it."

It is hoped that, in time, once the qualifications have bedded in and enough members of the profession have undertaken and completed the certificate, they may act as a pathway to a formal Advanced Veterinary Nurse status, similar to the relationship between the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Practice and Advanced Practitioner status for veterinary surgeons.

Both VN Education Committee and VN Council will be looking at the issue of this status over the coming years.

The full details of the framework for the new qualifications – including the candidate enrolment process, candidate requirements, assessment methods, guidance on curricula and the accreditation and reaccreditation standards – can be found in the committee papers for VN Council.

Any veterinary nurses or Higher/ Further Education institutions who are interested in the Certificate in Advanced Veterinary Nursing should contact the RCVS VN Department on [vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:vetnursing@rcvs.org.uk) or 020 7202 0788.

# RCVS commits to improving mental health

During Mental Health Awareness Week the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) has been recognised as an employer committed to supporting mental health.

RCVS Chief Executive Officer and Mind Matters Initiative Director Lizzie Lockett (pictured above) signed the Time to Change Employer Pledge today, the first day of the Awareness Week, thereby demonstrating the College's commitment to supporting mental wellness in the workplace and its strategy to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Time to Change is a social movement working to change the way society looks at mental health problems, improving attitudes and behaviour surrounding this. When employers sign the Time to Change Pledge they commit to addressing the stigma surrounding mental health in addition to making sure that employees facing mental health problems feel supported.

"With mental health-related issues disproportionately prevalent in the veterinary professions, the RCVS has already undertaken significant work to put support systems in place to look after the mental health and wellbeing of veterinary professionals," says Lizzie.

"However, in conjunction with Mind Matters' industry-wide interventions and awareness raising, we recognise that best practice needs to begin 'at home' in our London office and that we need to look after the mental health and wellbeing of our own staff. We are committed to meeting the same standards we recommend for the wider veterinary industry and, although we currently do a lot to achieve this aim, we are always looking to do more."

The RCVS has developed an action plan to lay the road map for future initiatives that will continue to address and improve mental wellness and awareness at the College. This plan has been accepted by Time to Change and the RCVS is now looking forward to putting the plan into motion, with the ongoing support from Time to Change throughout the first year of this process.

The action plan includes initiatives such as bolstering the RCVS Wellbeing Group, comprising a wide variety of employees from across the organisation, by creating Time to Change Workplace Champions to further promote workplace mental wellness. These champions will be proactively recruited from across diverse groups, and, like all RCVS staff, will be able to attend Mental Health Awareness training and will receive support in their role as champions from the College's Mind Matters Manager.

Alongside this work, the College will also continue to run its &me campaign, a joint anti-stigma campaign run in partnership with Doctors' Support Network, which encourages senior professionals from the veterinary and medical professions to share their personal experiences of mental health problems. Sharing these stories can be a powerful tool in fighting stigma across both the professions and within the College, and encourages employees, who feel able and willing, to share their own story as part of this campaign.

The RCVS has also previously been recognised by Great Place to Work as a Centre of Excellence in Wellbeing and, to ensure the capturing of data around stigma and attitudes towards mental health, the RCVS will be adding more mental health-related questions to their annual staff engagement survey. This will inform the ongoing development of the action plan and feed into the creation of further support initiatives.

"We're delighted to see the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons take the Time to Change Employers Pledge. By signing the pledge and introducing questions specifically related to mental health stigma in their employee engagement survey, implementing workplace interventions developed as part of RCVS' Mind Matters initiative and participating in a number of national campaigns and events, the RCVS is demonstrating a real commitment to changing the way we all think and act about mental health in the workplace," says Jo Loughran, Director of Time to Change.

"We know it can be hard to talk about mental health, which is why we work with employers to encourage staff at all levels to open up, to talk and to listen. Too many people with mental health problems are made to feel isolated, ashamed and worthless, but with the right support, those of us with mental health problems can recover and have equal opportunities in all areas of life. Everyone's attitude makes a difference and it's fantastic to see organisations like the RCVS taking the lead."

# Fellowship Day 2019 - Save the date

We will be holding our fourth annual RCVS Fellowship Day on Friday 20 September 2019 at The Royal Institution in Mayfair, London.

Hosted by Professor Nick Bacon, Chair of the RCVS Fellowship Board, Fellowship Day 2019 will welcome the fourth cohort of Fellows to be awarded under the new Fellowship initiative. It will also provide a forum to celebrate the achievements of Fellows and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experience, encouraging a thriving learning society.

"Fellowship Day is about celebrating the achievement of established members of the profession and gives us a chance to learn more about their work. Through these kinds of events, we foster a society of Fellows who can share their knowledge and generate discussion, to enhance animal welfare standards for the benefit of the profession, the scientific community, and the public as a whole," says Nick.

We will also be inviting Fellows to participate in 'Fellows in Focus' sessions on the day, in which any FRCVS can give a 10-minute talk on an interesting topic of their choice, in the world-famous surroundings of the Faraday Lecture Theatre. We will be writing to Fellows in due course to invite submissions for this part of the programme.

There will also be a session dedicated to 'Fellows of the Future', building on the success of this student competition at Fellowship Day 2018 where six veterinary undergraduates and postgraduates presented excellent presentations. This competition is open to all UK-based veterinary students, including undergraduates, postgraduates and recent graduates, who would like to present some of their original research in no longer than five minutes. Further details will be available on the RCVS website shortly at [www.rcvs.org.uk/fellowshipday](http://www.rcvs.org.uk/fellowshipday).

As well as inviting all RCVS Fellows, any RCVS members who would like to learn more about the Fellowship are very welcome to attend. To this end, the College is encouraging all Fellows to invite as their guests any Members of the RCVS who are interested in potentially applying for the Fellowship.

Tickets to the event will be available soon. More information, including keynote speakers and Fellows in Focus topics, will be available soon.

Those with any questions about attending the event should contact the RCVS Events team on [events@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:events@rcvs.org.uk).



# New VN career case studies published

To observe the end of the British Veterinary Nursing Association's Veterinary Nursing Awareness Month, we have published a suite of new blogs and a VN Futures Board update on the VN Futures website.

VN Futures is a joint initiative, from the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) and the British Veterinary Nursing Association (BVNA), that aims to help the veterinary nursing profession visualise future challenges and how best to respond to them to promote and ensure a vibrant and sustainable profession into the future.

The new blogs cover veterinary nursing career case studies and aim to highlight differing career pathways available to veterinary nurses. Three new career cases have been recently added, from Carl Rudkin, an oncology nurse at Davies Veterinary Specialists; Samantha Thomson, a clinical nursing manager at North Downs Veterinary Referrals; and Claire Speight (pictured), a head nurse at Vets4Pets Kettering.

"The veterinary nursing profession offers many opportunities for career progression, and the case studies, from veterinary nurses in a wide variety of different roles, are a great way to help nurses find more about the diverse career pathways available," says VN Futures Project Manager Jill Macdonald.

One of the new career case studies interviews Claire Speight who is Head Nurse at Kettering Vets4Pets and, in addition to working in practice, regularly lectures to veterinary nurses, students and members of the public on rabbit medicine and surgery. The case study covers what Claire enjoys about her job as well as what she finds challenging. It also looks at how she achieved her current position and her plans for the future.

Claire says that what she enjoys about her job is "working with the best team and all the lovely animals and clients we meet every day. Each day is different – you just never know what will walk through the door. When you have been involved in a case and watching the patient reunited with their owner, knowing you have helped to achieve that."

Claire's full story can be found on the VN Futures website.

In addition to the blogs, there is also a section offering an introduction to the VN Futures Board members, appointed in May 2018; and an update on a recent meeting, available on the website. The Board report progress on the VN Futures initiative with a notable achievement being the approval of the Post-registration Qualifications Framework by VN Council earlier this month. The framework was created from the work carried out by the VN Futures Post Registration Qualifications Working Group, and will offer the opportunity for nurses to study for an Advanced Certificate in Veterinary Nursing.

The Board has also formalised the working groups around key themes from the 2016 VN Futures report.

"The Working Groups are where the real work and delivery of the VN Futures initiative lives. We are fortunate to be able to draw upon a breadth of talent and diversity of interests. This is a timely refresh of the membership of our Working Groups ensuring members are available and willing to help progress these important matters," a spokesperson said.

The full Board update can be found here: <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/vn-futures-board-reports-progress/>.

Those wishing to get involved in the VN Futures initiative should visit <https://www.vetfutures.org.uk/vnfutures/how-can-i-get-involved/> for contact details.

# RCVS leadership programme EFMD Awards finalist

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), NHS Leadership Academy and FutureLearn have been announced as finalists in the prestigious EFMD (European Foundation for Management Development) Excellence in Practice Awards.

The collaboration between the three organisations was recognised in the Professional Development Awards category for their RCVS Edward Jenner Veterinary Leadership Programme.

The leadership programme is a free-to-access Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for veterinary professionals, hosted on the FutureLearn online social learning platform and developed in partnership with the NHS Leadership Academy.

The RCVS launched the programme as part of the Vet Futures project (an initiative run jointly with the British Veterinary Association) to encourage and support the development of everyday leadership skills for all members of the veterinary team, addressing the importance of leadership in the veterinary setting, along with the art of good leadership and decision-making.

Working in partnership with the NHS Leadership Academy has also cemented the importance of the One Health initiative by bringing veterinary and human health professionals together. The Academy works tirelessly to support leaders at every level of the NHS to improve patient care and the collaboration has enabled the RCVS to harness the key elements of the Academy's approach. It has also provided an important test-bed for innovative learning techniques which are now being adopted by the Academy's own programmes to support leadership development across NHS-funded care.

The programme also actively encourages participants from the human and animal health fields to discuss and reflect together on leadership issues as part of their final assessment. The creation of this forum should enhance shared appreciation and engender greater understanding of the healthcare challenges that span both settings.

"The course is an invaluable learning resource that I believe could enhance the careers of both experienced and newly-qualified vets."

"The EFMD Excellence in Practice Awards are prestigious awards recognising collaborative management and leadership programmes across the globe and we are honoured to be a finalist," said Anthony Roberts, RCVS Director of Leadership and Innovation.

"The RCVS, NHS Leadership Academy and FutureLearn team have put a huge amount of work into developing the Edward Jenner Veterinary Leadership Programme to ensure that, whether you are a veterinary surgeon, veterinary nurse, practice manager or student, this programme will be relevant and useful for your professional career and development."

The programme, initially piloted in summer 2018, grew from a need identified by the Vet Futures project which reported that "concerns have been articulated about the number and profile of vets and veterinary nurses stepping forward for leadership roles".

The leadership programme has since aimed to change this and has already proved successful with well over 5,000 enrolments across the programme's modules. Participants include veterinary surgeons and nurses drawn from over 130 countries, demonstrating its universal relevance.

FutureLearn's Global Healthcare Lead, Helen Fuller, said: "We're delighted that a programme that has seen such strong collaboration between all involved and received such positive learner feedback should be recognised by the EFMD Excellence in Practice Awards."

"The success of the programme has evidenced the transformative power of online learning and is particular testament to FutureLearn's social learning pedagogy. Over 14,000 comments have been posted by learners on the programme and it's great that we can facilitate a global conversation on what is clearly such an important issue to the veterinary professions."

Programme participant, Andrew Smerdon described the course as "an invaluable learning resource that I believe could enhance the careers of both experienced and newly-qualified vets, whether in practice or in other roles in wider society."

"It has given me real insight into how to view myself and how others may view me as a leader. The examples demonstrated realistic challenges faced by vets at various stages of their careers and challenged the individual to reflect on, and thereby learn by, their own responses. I would definitely recommend it," said Andrew.

The programme, which runs for 14 weeks, comprises two free-to-access online courses with an optional paid final assessment and is supported by the innovative audio drama, 'The Glenvern Tapes: Vets in Practice', which portrays the leadership challenges encountered in daily practice.

"This course really highlighted leadership qualities that are often taken for granted. The course demonstrates that you do not need a status position in order to demonstrate effective leadership even though status positions are often where we look for leadership," said programme participant, Simon Patchett, adding: "I would recommend this course to both vets and nurses in clinical practice - it's a real eye opener, and as a result of doing the course perhaps we can see a less age-restricted approach to leadership within the veterinary profession."

# 'Precision veterinary medicine' the theme for second ViVet Innovation Symposium

The RCVS landmark innovation initiative ViVet will focus on how rapidly developing technology and data-driven practice will transform the veterinary professions and the care they provide for its second-ever Innovation Symposium this autumn.

The ViVet Innovation Symposium takes place on 1 October at The Lowry Theatre in Salford, Greater Manchester, and will see a number of guest speakers explore, with delegates, how artificial intelligence (AI), big data and genomics are and will be changing the profession by putting more information in the hands of the veterinary practitioner than ever before.

The ViVet programme grew out of the joint RCVS and British Veterinary Association (BVA) Vet Futures project which had, as one of its core aims, the establishment of a project to help encourage veterinary innovation and entrepreneurship and, through case studies and thought leadership, help the profession understand and thrive in the changing environment.

To this end, this year's keynote speaker will be Nancy Rademaker, an IT professional with first-hand experiences straight from the places where technology is shaping our future. She will cover the impact of digitization on customer behavior and how that affects the way organisations should interact with customers while giving insights into how the veterinary professions can prepare for and thrive in the future.

Nancy has over 20 years of experience in how technology is transforming society, working for different IT companies, amongst which five years for Microsoft in the Netherlands and Europe. She loves to share her passion for technology and combines that valuable inside information with her experience in training and education.

Other speakers confirmed for the day include:

- Kathy Turner, Corporate Vice President and General Manager for IDEXX Laboratories' Europe, Middle East and Africa Companion Animal Commercial Operations who will be speaking about changing customer attitudes and preventative veterinary medicine.
- Matthew Smith, Director of Business Development at Microsoft, who will be speaking about AI and agriculture.
- Iain Maclaren, Senior Market Development Manager in Agrigenomics, Food and Consumer Genomics at Oxford Nanopore Technologies Ltd who will be speaking about low-cost and accessible genomic sequencing.
- During the course of the event we will also be hosting the ViVet Student Veterinary Innovation Competition final, which sees three finalist teams going head to head presenting in front of a panel of industry professionals including BVA President Simon Doherty.

Anthony Roberts, RCVS Director of Leadership and Innovation, said: "Since our inaugural innovation symposium in 2017, innovation and technology adoption in the wider animal health and welfare sector has accelerated. In the longer term it is clear that technology will fundamentally change the role of the vet and how veterinary services are delivered.

"It is ViVet's role to ensure veterinary professionals can navigate this transition and remain at the centre of animal health and welfare. It does this by providing insights as to what the future could look like, and supporting veterinary professionals to develop the skills they need to take charge of and to shape that future, by leading innovation.

"This event provides an extraordinary opportunity for any vet or veterinary nurse who wants to understand how to adapt and use these new developments, learn about precision veterinary medicine, what it means for the future of veterinary care, and learn about new roles for vets being produced by these changes."

Tickets for the event can be secured through the Innovation Symposium's dedicated Eventbrite page with discounted tickets available for veterinary students and veterinary nurses.

More information about the ViVet project, as well as videos and reports from the 2017 Innovation Symposium at which the project was launched, can be found on the project's dedicated website.

# Register now for Mind Matters Symposium

The RCVS' second Mind Matters Initiative Research Symposium, 'Understanding and supporting veterinary mental health', is now open for registrations.

The symposium, which will be held on Tuesday 24 September 2019, at Church House, London, will bring together researchers interested in all aspects of veterinary professionals' wellbeing and mental health.

The symposium will feature plenary speakers from mental health research, including:

Sustaining resilience at work – what does the evidence tell us works?: Professor Neil Greenberg, Professor of Defence Mental Health, Consultant Academic Psychiatrist at King's College London, Chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' (RCP) Special Interest Group in Occupational Psychiatry.

The impact of veterinarian suicide on colleagues: Dr Alexandra Pitman, Associate Professor in Psychiatry in the UCL Division of Psychiatry and an Honorary Consultant Psychiatrist at Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust.

The Mind Matters Initiative – what we've achieved so far: Professor Stuart Reid, Principal, Royal Veterinary College, Chair of the Mind Matters Initiative.

"It's really important that any mental health and wellbeing interventions are evidence based, so bringing together researchers in this area is vital to underpin the work that we and others carry out to better support veterinary professionals," says RCVS CEO, Lizzie Lockett.

"Our first Research Symposium, held in Edinburgh in 2017, had an amazing energy - there was curiosity to understand such a complex area, a real drive to provide evidence that can be translated into meaningful action and a strong sense of community. I hope that our second Symposium will build on this and make a really exciting contribution to the field."

Tickets for the symposium cost £45 and can be purchased on Eventbrite.

A small number of travel bursaries are available for students, people with lived experience of mental health problems, and people who are unwaged, who would not otherwise be able to attend. For further details, please contact Lisa Quigley, Mind Matters Initiative Manager, on [l.quigley@rcvs.org.uk](mailto:l.quigley@rcvs.org.uk).

Call for submissions

The symposium is also currently open for applications for presentations on veterinary mental health and wellbeing research, with abstracts being accepted up until 23:59 (GMT) on Friday 19 April 2019.

Applicants should note that presentations should be in the format of a 15-minute oral presentation or an A1 poster.

Those wishing to apply should submit an abstract clearly marked 'poster' or 'oral presentation'. The title should be 15 words or fewer. The abstract should include author(s) first name(s), followed by surname(s), institution of affiliation and country. The body of the text should be no longer than 250 words and include: background; clear and explicit aims and objectives, hypotheses or research questions; methods; results; discussion; and conclusion.

All abstracts should be submitted as Word documents to Rosie Allister on [rosie.allister@gmail.com](mailto:rosie.allister@gmail.com).

Applicants will be notified if they have been successful within 14 days of this date. Speakers whose applications are successful will receive complimentary registration for the symposium, not including travel and accommodation costs.

# Veterinary schools seeking input from graduate employers

Following the Veterinary Schools Council's inaugural survey of veterinary employers in 2017, the veterinary schools have now joined forces with the RCVS to launch a new survey for employers of recent graduates.

This joint survey will continue to give employers a means of providing their insights on recent graduates from veterinary schools of the UK and Ireland, while reducing the number of survey requests that employers receive from individual veterinary schools.

The survey results will also provide valuable information about Graduate Outcomes such as preparedness for practice, and experience of the Professional Development Phase, against which any future changes in policy can be evaluated.

In the 2017 survey, employers commended the communications skills and empathy of graduates while rating them lower on financial and business management. The new survey will enable veterinary schools to see any shifts since that time, while previous feedback on the survey's format has been incorporated to make it simpler and clearer for employers.

In addition to the employer survey, the Veterinary Schools Council is launching a parallel survey for graduates, providing further insights into how veterinary education can respond to the needs of the workplace. This too will support future educational development work carried out by the RCVS.

Professor Ewan Cameron, Chair of the Veterinary Schools Council and RCVS Council member, said:

“Two years ago we made a commitment to an improved and ongoing conversation with the employers of our graduates. Since conducting that first survey we've met with employers' groups to discuss the findings, the veterinary curriculum and the complexities around areas such as emotional resilience.

“Vet schools and employers working together is part of optimising the transition for new vets into the workplace. Another key voice is that of the recent graduates themselves, which is why we are introducing a new national survey for three-to-five-year graduated vets as well.

“This desire to listen and adapt is how our vet schools became ranked among the very best in the world. We look forward to continuing the dialogue and helping to create the profession of tomorrow.”

Professor Susan Rhind, Chair of the VSC Education Committee, said:

“As educators we want our decisions to be evidence-based, so this survey will be invaluable to informing our work in readiness for practice. Over time we are hoping to build a full picture that reveals trends. This will provide a strong basis for the allocation of resources to certain areas, as well as direction for conversations with employers.

“As the workplace evolves so too must veterinary education. We're very pleased to make the voice of employers a part of this process. The more people who respond to the survey, the more meaningful the insights will be.”

Professor Susan Dawson (pictured), Chair of RCVS Education Committee, added:

“A key component of the Graduate Outcomes project has been that the RCVS as regulator should work very closely with the vet schools so that they are working towards the common goal of making sure that veterinary graduates are the right fit for the profession and the improvement of that transitional stage. We are very glad to be working with the VSC on this survey, to ensure that we have relevant information against which the impact of future educational interventions can be measured. The honest and frank feedback of employers and graduates on how veterinary education is working – and where it is not – is vital for our aims.”

# Blog

## &me – Meghan Conroy

Meghan Conroy is a registered veterinary nurse who qualified in 2013. Since then Meghan has worked in both first opinion and referral practices and is now head nurse of a group of practices in Southampton. Her passions include medical nursing, emergency and critical care and raising clinical standards for general practice nurses.

I always knew I had the black dog of depression with me, lurking in the shadows. I had grown up watching a close relative tackle anxiety and depression everyday. That relative was a warrior but I knew I didn't ever want to face what they did on a daily basis and I was determined not to acknowledge my struggles. Determined not to be deemed weak and incapable.

It was a dark day in January when I first felt the pain of discrimination due to my mental health. After years of battling and coming to terms with my mental illness, I never thought that my beloved veterinary profession would turn its back on me, but it did. Opportunities given to others, being slowly pushed out of a job you love because of your mental health. Using the excuse of not wanting to 'stress' you. I had watched this happen to the same family member as above before and I could feel my world crumbling. A job I loved slipping through my fingertips because of my mental health. Eventually, for my health I left the job I loved, putting my ego and shame into a box and off to find a practice that embraced me with all that entailed.

It was difficult at first, I was 'too honest' at interviews. I told my potential employers about my experiences with depression and anxiety and how I felt that made me a stronger nurse. I wanted to be honest but maybe all I wanted was acceptance. I even had one potential employer openly tell me my mental health impacted her decision. After a few more interviews with me holding my tongue I found a job at Brook House veterinary surgery in Southampton part of a group of four practices known as the Southampton Hub. The head nurse and practice manager were great from the get go. Supportive, embracing and approachable.

Within those first few months my confidence grew and my experiences were acknowledged. The healing had begun but I knew my challenges were not over. In January 2018 I was promoted to Head nurse for the Hub of practices and had volunteered for BSAVA Southern region and congress committee. I felt on top of the world. I was married in July 2018, the best day of my life. But then suddenly, my black dog was upon me. Everything from the last eighteen months crashed down on me like a tsunami. Everything I had pushed to the back of my mind came flooding back. This is when I truly started to change how I viewed my mental health.

Before it was a dark, damning secret that I was ashamed of. Now I had supportive colleagues who genuinely just wanted me to get better. After five weeks off work, medication and starting counselling I was ready to give work another go. I remember taking my first blood sample, shaking and tears filling my eyes. I didn't think I would ever be whole again. Eight months on from my last episode, I feel stronger than ever, I fought every day until one day it became easier. My employers at the Southampton Hub and wider CVS have been incredible. Giving me the tools I need to help myself and allowing me great opportunities.

Hopefully this year I will be starting my graduate nursing diploma and continuing on my journey of self worth. I'm now head nurse of five practices and still volunteer for BSAVA. We talk often about what our mental health takes away from us but what has my mental health given me? It's given me a greater understanding and empathy towards others. My mental health is a part of me, but it does not define me. Certainly not as a nurse.



# Blog

## Dr Alex Avery BVSc - Founder OurPetsHealth.com

I am a small animal vet working on the other side of the world in New Zealand. I graduated from Bristol in 2006 and after three years in mixed practice set off on a world tour that ended up stopping in NZ, where I have been ever since apart from a two-year stint in a busy companion practice on England's south coast.

I have always been passionate about trying to educate my clients as fully as possible, and it doesn't take much time on the internet to come across some really harmful pet health information, advice, and recommendations. With the idea behind ourpetshealth.com having been bubbling away in the background for a number of years, I finally launched the website, YouTube channel and podcast in November 2017. Our Pets Health provides complete veterinary healthcare advice via creative and innovative series of videos and podcasts explaining and answering questions on how you can support your cat and dog to allow them to live healthier, happier lives.

What are you most proud of, and why?

Taking action! How many of us have had an idea and a strong desire to start some kind of project only for it to be filed away for another day when life wasn't quite so busy (which never comes)?

The veterinary degree equips us with the ability to efficiently search out, consume and process a large amount of information. Life in practice then forces us to think outside the box and come up with solutions to a multitude of problems, due to the limitations of money, funds, expectations or expertise. I think this background is vital when it comes to embracing the challenges and opportunities of providing for the healthcare needs of pets from all demographics, in all corners of the globe.

I'm also proud to be part of such an amazing profession. The support and feedback I've received has personally made a huge difference, and I hope also demonstrates a recognition that there is a need for vets to engage with the wider pet-owning public to improve education.

How do you think that change in other industries will drive change in the veterinary profession?

I think the potential for significant disruption to the current veterinary service model is huge. From the software business, that has very much switched from a retail to subscription model, to the human health service, where video consultations are being introduced which allow diagnosis and treatments to be made without a patient having to physically visit the doctor.

Of course, not all developments in other industries can easily be applied to the veterinary profession. It is important, however, in my opinion, to pay close attention to all the different types of services our clients are accessing. The veterinary profession is as much a service industry as it is part of the health industry. While we must always put the needs of our patients first, if the profession is not able to adapt to client needs then there is a real risk a large proportion of the pet-owning public will simply stop engaging with vets for all but the most serious conditions. Instead, they could turn to alternative forms of health advice and treatment, to the detriment of their pet's health.

Telemedicine is already making inroads in the profession and, despite reasonable objections regarding the appropriateness of this for all cases, it is something that I believe will continue to develop very rapidly. In the not too distant future, I would not be surprised if telemedicine in some form becomes the first point of contact that most clients and patients have with a veterinarian.

What innovation has the greatest opportunity to change the health and welfare of animals?

Increasing use and development of remote communication technologies (be that video, augmented reality or virtual reality), combined with the development of wearable or implantable technology, has the potential to impact the global pet population as a whole. Not only will it give more people than ever before access to quality veterinary services, but these developments will also allow us to detect all manner of diseases at a much earlier stage.

Early detection and intervention will allow us to offer improved, tailored care to our current patient base. It will also allow us to provide improved preventative health advice to people with no access to veterinary services, as well as "triage"



patients whose owners would not otherwise engage with the traditional veterinary model until absolutely necessary.

How could vets better meet the needs of today's clients and patients?

I think there needs to be a wider recognition of where our clients are seeking answers to their pet health questions. Everything from what food to feed and which parasite control to use, through to how they should be treating their cat's kidney failure or dog's arthritis. Even our most engaged clients are doing this.

While a pet owner who has already made the trip into the consult room has made an investment into building a relationship with you, it is still up to us to cement this by being the number one source of information. We also need to recognise that we are no longer the individual gatekeepers of this information. While vets are the only people who can diagnose and prescribe, all of the information surrounding any diagnosis and treatment, as well as that concerning preventative health, is in the public domain.

We should not be scared of this. If a client is given reliable, accurate information from an external source that fits the practice ethos, then they will have improved understanding as to why recommendations were made and compliance should be greatly improved. It will also reinforce the idea that we as vets, rather than internet forums, are the number one experts to consult and trust with the care of their pet.

This does not mean that all veterinary practices need to reinvent the wheel. If a clinic does not have the resources to produce their own content (likely due to a lack of time), then they should consider having a list of other resources for every common condition seen or preventative health recommendation made. There are plenty of valuable resources out there, they just don't often make the first page of a Google search. Rather than simply being the source, we should also see one of our roles as the expert curators of information.

What can we look forward to next from Our Pets Health?

This year is certainly set up to be just as busy as the last. I launched a new podcast at the end of February. Podcasting is a medium that I have grown to really enjoy both producing and consuming. I believe it offers a much more intimate way to communicate compared to video or blog posts and is definitely something that practices could consider diving into.

I also have a number of collaborations lined up with a couple of other online veterinary creators. I hope that by combining forces we will be able to bring the message of evidence-based medicine to a wider audience. I am also working on a project to produce some client resources for practices to allow them to better engage their clients in the limited time that is generally available.

# Events

## **Vet Festival 2019**

Friday 7 and Saturday 8 June 2019, Loseley Park, Guildford, Surrey GU3 1HS

## **CPD course for overseas vets and VNs**

Tuesday 11 and Wednesday 12 June 2019, RCVS, Belgravia House, 62-64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF

## **RCVS Council**

Thursday 13 June 2019, RCVS, Belgravia House, 62 – 64 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AF

## **The Royal Highland Show**

Thursday 20 June to Sunday 23 June 2019, Royal Highland Centre, Ingliston, Newbridge EH28 8NB

## **Royal College Day**

Friday 12 July 2019, Royal Institute of British Architects, 66 Portland Place, London W1B 1AD

## **Countryfile Live 2019**

Thursday 15 to Sunday 18 August, Castle Howard, York YO60 7DA

# DC reprimands vet for dishonesty and consent breaches

The RCVS Disciplinary Committee, chaired by Professor Alistair Barr, has issued a reprimand and warning as to future conduct to a veterinary surgeon for serious professional misconduct in relation to their admitted failure to obtain necessary consent for posts on social media and dishonesty in communication.

The hearing of the case against Dr Natalia Anna Strokowska took place between Wednesday 17 April and Tuesday 30 April 2019 when the Disciplinary Committee considered four charges against her. The first charge was that, being registered in the 'Practising Outside the United Kingdom' category of the Register of Veterinary Surgeons maintained by the RCVS, she practised as a veterinary surgeon in the counties of Somerset, Shropshire, London, Lancashire and Norfolk between 1 July 2016 and 31 August 2017 when she was not registered as UK-practising. The charges were that her conduct in relation to this was dishonest and misleading to her employer and/or clients.

The second charge was that, between 1 October 2016 and 31 July 2017, Dr Strokowska made posts on social media which included photographs of and/or comments about animals being treated at practices at which she worked, without the consent of the owner of that animal and/or the practice at which it was being treated.

The third charge was that, between 1 January 2017 and 1 March 2017, Dr Strokowska made posts on social media which included photographs of and/or videos of and/or comments about animals being treated at Goddards Veterinary Hospital in Wanstead, without the consent of the treating and/or operating veterinary surgeon.

The fourth charge was that, between 20 July 2017 and 9 September 2017, Dr Strokowska made representations to the practice principal of Barn Lodge, in Lancashire, and/or a student vet working at the practice that she had gained consent for photographs and social media posts when she had not, and that her conduct was dishonest and misleading.

At the outset of the hearing, the respondent admitted to having practised as a veterinary surgeon in the UK when she was registered as practising outside the UK, but disputed that she had been dishonest or misleading with regards to this. She also admitted to the entirety of the second charge and part of the third, but, under the latter charge, denied that she had, without consent, taken a video of an animal being operated on by a veterinary colleague. Finally, she admitted to dishonest and misleading conduct with regard to part of the fourth charge, but denied that, on 21 July and 25 July 2017, she informed the practice principal that she had been told that she would be allowed to take photographs at Barn Lodge and post these on social media, when she had not been so told.

The Disciplinary Committee went on to consider the facts of the case for each of the charges that remained in issue.

Having considered all of the evidence, the Committee accepted that she did not have her registration status with the RCVS in her mind while she was working in the UK during the period in question. Accordingly, the Committee did not find her to have been dishonest.

With regards to the third charge the Committee considered the issue of whether the video in question had been posted "without the consent of the treating and/or operating veterinary surgeon". After examining the relevant evidence (which included the video in question) the Committee determined that the evidence did not support the facts charged and thus that charge three was not proved.

With regards to the fourth charge, Strokowska denied that her conduct in relation to informing the principal that she had been told that she would be allowed to take photographs and post these on social media was dishonest or misleading, on the basis that she believed she had permission to take and post photographs on social media. The Committee was not able to be sure as to how she sought this consent and the response provided and so the charge was found not proved.

The Committee then went on to consider whether the charges that were admitted amounted to serious professional misconduct.

The Committee found that it was the Respondent's responsibility to ensure that her registration status was appropriate at the time she was doing locum work in the UK. However she had provided her RCVS registration number to all the practices she had worked for and in the view of the committee there was no intention to deceive anyone. In the judgement of the Committee, her conduct was not sufficiently grave so as to constitute serious professional misconduct.

The Committee, in its judgement, concluded that her conduct in relation to the second charge did fall far short of the behaviour to be expected of a member of the veterinary profession, and amounted to serious professional misconduct.

The Committee considered that all members of the profession are obliged to ensure that they comply with the provisions of the Code of Professional Conduct, and the supporting guidance, in relation to the use of the internet and social media.

Unauthorised posting of photographs of animals being treated by a veterinary surgeon on social media may well cause distress to the owners, and damage to the reputation of the profession as a whole, and to the reputation of individual practices.

The aspect of the third charge admitted by the respondent involved posting a photograph with accompanying text of a dog without the consent of the treating and/or operating veterinary surgeon. The Committee considered that this was, indeed, a matter of professional discourtesy, but did not consider that it amounted to serious professional misconduct.

The respondent admitted the fourth charge and admitted that her conduct was dishonest and misleading. The Committee, in its judgement, considered that by choosing to lie in response to a genuine professional enquiry about her conduct, her behaviour fell far short of that to be expected from a member of the veterinary profession, and constituted serious professional misconduct.

The Committee next considered what, if any, sanction to impose. In mitigation the Committee considered the following: that the postings were an attempt to promote the health and welfare of animals; the lack of risk of harm or actual harm to an animal or human; no apparent financial gain from her actions; her youth and inexperience at the time of the misconduct; her open and frank admissions at an early stage; her subsequent efforts to avoid repetition; the lapse of time since the incident; and her demonstration of insight into the effects of her postings on some owners.

The Committee considered the available sanctions in order starting with no further action. The Committee did not consider that this was appropriate where the serious professional misconduct found in this case involved dishonesty, even given the mitigating factors relating to that as outlined above, nor in view of the repeated nature of the social media posts without owner consent.

The Committee determined that a reprimand and warning as to future conduct was the appropriate sanction in the circumstances of this case.

Dr Strokowska was reprimanded for her serious professional misconduct in relation to her admitted failure to obtain necessary consent for posts on social media and her dishonesty in communication.

She was warned that she should in future be fully aware of, and comply with, the provisions of the RCVS Code of Professional Conduct and its supporting guidance, in particular as it relates to the use of social media, including the need to ensure that she has obtained all the necessary consents from all relevant parties.

# Disciplinary Committee rules on misappropriation of puppy case

The RCVS Disciplinary Committee has suspended a London-based veterinary surgeon for six months while finding no misconduct against another in a hearing regarding the taking of two newborn puppies from their owner.

The hearing for the two respondents – Dr Zahra Tahaneem Rafiq and Mr Oscar Perez Maillo – took place between Monday 29 April to Wednesday 8 May and concerned an incident that took place at the VetsNow Huyton premises in Liverpool.

There were two charges against Dr Rafiq. The first charge was that, on 2 or 3 December 2017 shortly after a litter of puppies was delivered by caesarean to a French Bulldog named Lila, she took one of the puppies away from the practice with the intention that it should not be returned to Lila's owner and that, in doing so, she was dishonest, misleading and had not acted in the best interest of the puppy's welfare. Another puppy was taken away by an animal care assistant who was also working at Vets Now Huyton on the night in question.

The second charge against Dr Rafiq was that she had told her employer at VetsNow that the puppy she had taken from the practice had died in the car when she had been driving home when, in fact, the puppy was alive at that stage and, in telling her employer this, she had been dishonest and misleading.

There was one charge against Mr Perez which stated that he had made an entry in the clinical records for Lila that she had given birth to just four live puppies when in fact she had six; that he had only discharged four of the six puppies to the owner; that he knew that his colleagues intended to remove or had removed the puppies; that he had failed to prevent the removal of the puppies and had failed to report to a colleague the removal of the puppies. The charge further stated that, in relation to the above, Mr Perez was dishonest, misleading, did not act in the best interests of the puppies' welfare and failed to keep accurate clinical records.

At the outset of the hearing, Dr Rafiq admitted in full the charges against her and accepted that she had acted dishonestly. Mr Perez admitted some of the charges against him including that he had made the false clinical record, had discharged four rather than six puppies and had failed to keep accurate clinical records, however he denied any knowledge of the intention to remove puppies and denied that his conduct had been misleading or dishonest.

The Committee was not satisfied, on the basis of the evidence presented to it, that Mr Perez knew at the time of surgery that his colleagues intended to remove the puppies and, furthermore, also considered that there was insufficient evidence to the required standard that he subsequently became aware of their removal. As a result, the Committee also did not find that he, could have prevented their removal or reported the matter to a colleague.

The Committee did however find that his actions were unintentionally misleading regarding the clinical records and the discharge of the incorrect number of puppies. The Committee also found proved against Dr Rafiq, all the charges against her.

Having considered the facts, the Committee then moved on to consider whether the admitted and/or proven charges against Dr Rafiq and Mr Perez amounted to serious professional misconduct.

In respect of Mr Perez, the Committee was critical of his failure to keep accurate clinical records and considered that it was his duty to know how many puppies were born and to record accurately this number. However, while the Committee concluded that Mr Perez's conduct fell below the expected professional standards of a veterinary surgeon, it did not fall so short as to constitute serious professional misconduct. As a result, no further action was taken against Mr Perez.

In regard to Dr Rafiq, the Committee recognised her admission at the outset that her actions constituted serious professional misconduct and it noted her expression of remorse. The Committee did however have concerns regarding the evidence she gave as to her actions being motivated by animal welfare concerns. The Committee felt that such concerns should have been raised with colleagues and it found that Dr Rafiq had acted recklessly and had been dishonest both with the owner and with her colleagues. The Committee therefore concluded that her conduct fell so far short of what would be expected of a veterinary surgeon that it constituted serious professional misconduct.

The Committee then went on to consider the sanction against Dr Rafiq, taking into account aggravating and mitigating factors. The aggravating factors included a risk of injury to the puppies, an abuse of the client's trust, sustained miscon-

duct as the puppy was retained by Dr Rafiq from 2/3 December until its actual death on the night of 5 December, that the dishonesty was sustained until 7 December and that she had only demonstrated limited insight in respect of her wider professional responsibilities.

In mitigation, the Committee considered that her actions involved no financial gain, that it was a single and isolated incident, that she had no previous adverse findings, that she had demonstrated genuine remorse and that she had made admissions at an early stage. Dr Rafiq, who was unrepresented during the hearing, also submitted evidence in mitigation including testimonials from colleagues and clients, her youth and inexperience at the time, and her remorse, among other things.

In deciding the sanction Ian Arundale, who chaired the Committee and spoke on its behalf, said: "The Committee concluded that Dr Rafiq was a competent veterinary surgeon who was very unlikely to pose a risk to animals in the future. However, it considered the reputation of the profession and the need to uphold standards was an important consideration that outweighed the hardship which would be suffered by Dr Rafiq by not being able to practise in her chosen profession. It considered that Dr Rafiq would be fit to return to the profession after a period of suspension.

"It therefore determined that, notwithstanding the nature and extent of the dishonesty in this case, a suspension order was a sufficiently severe sanction to maintain the reputation of the profession and to meet the wider public interest. It took into consideration the overall dishonesty, including that Dr Rafiq had been dishonest when first confronted about these matters, when deciding on the length of any suspension.

"The Committee considered the sanction of suspension was proportionate in the circumstances of this case where there was supporting evidence that Dr Rafiq was a competent and well-regarded veterinary surgeon. It considered the positive testimonial evidence given... and that she was held in high regard by her current employers who were aware of the admitted misconduct, were significant factors in deciding that a suspension order was the proportionate sanction."

The Committee determined that a six-month suspension order would be the most appropriate sanction under the circumstances and directed the Registrar to remove Dr Rafiq from the Register for this period of time.

# VN DC removes nurse from Register following animal poisoning conviction

The RCVS Veterinary Nurse (VN) Disciplinary Committee has directed that a Dunbartonshire-based veterinary nurse's name be removed from the Register of Veterinary Nurses following her conviction in 2017 for causing unnecessary pain and suffering to an animal.

In August 2017, Georgina Bretman was convicted following her trial before Glasgow Sheriff Court of a criminal offence contrary to the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) 2006 Act in relation to causing unnecessary pain and suffering to her two-year-old dog, named Florence.

The Sheriff Court found Miss Bretman guilty of causing unnecessary suffering to Florence by injecting a poisonous or injurious drug namely insulin causing Florence to suffer from hypoglycaemia, collapse, convulsions and seizures, for which Florence needed immediate veterinary treatment to avoid coma and death.

Following her conviction, Miss Bretman was sentenced to a Community Payback Order, with a requirement to carry out 140 hours of unpaid work, and, in addition, an order was made to take Florence away from her and to ban her from owning a dog for two years.

The VN Disciplinary Committee hearing for Miss Bretman took place on Monday 20 and Tuesday 21 May 2019. Miss Bretman admitted the facts as contained within the charge against her and, at the outset of the hearing, the Committee found the charge proved.

The VN Disciplinary Committee went on to consider whether the charge rendered Miss Bretman unfit to practise. The Committee heard from Miss Bretman's counsel, Mr O'Rourke QC who indicated that Miss Bretman accepted that her conviction rendered her unfit to practise as a Registered Veterinary Nurse.

The Committee found Miss Bretman's actions in deliberately administering a poisonous substance to Florence thereby risking Florence's death to be "very serious and deplorable conduct on the part of a veterinary nurse, a member of a profession specifically entrusted to look after and care for animals." It also took into account the fact that Florence needed urgent veterinary treatment to avoid death and that Miss Bretman was in a position of trust over Florence as her owner.

Stuart Drummond, chairing the Committee and speaking on its behalf, added: "Miss Bretman's conduct was also liable to have a seriously detrimental effect on the reputation of the profession and to undermine public confidence in the profession. The fact that she was a veterinary nurse was made clear at the trial and reported in the press. The Committee considered that members of the public would be rightly appalled that a Registered Veterinary Nurse had committed an offence of this kind.

The Committee was satisfied that this conduct fell far below the standard expected of a Registered Veterinary Nurse and that Miss Bretman's conviction was of a nature and seriousness that rendered her unfit to practise."

The Committee then heard oral evidence from Miss Bretman in which she detailed that she had always been passionate about working with animals and working in the veterinary profession and detailed how she enjoyed her work as a veterinary nurse with a particular interest in hydrotherapy and rehabilitation. She spoke about the devastating effect of the incident and the shame that was 'brought down on her head'.

She told the Committee that she had been suspended from her job and, since her conviction, had not worked as a veterinary nurse. Furthermore, Miss Bretman said that, while she accepted and respected the verdict of the court, her stance remained that she had not done what was alleged and now hoped to rebuild her career as a veterinary nurse. She accepted that the offence of which she had been convicted was very serious, particularly for a veterinary nurse.

In considering Miss Bretman's sanction the Committee took into account the aggravating and mitigating factors. Aggravating factors included the fact there was actual injury to an animal, that it was a pre-meditated and deliberate act against an animal for whom she was responsible, the fact that a medicinal product was misused, a lack of insight and a lack of remorse.

In mitigation the Committee took into account the fact she had no previous disciplinary history, had received positive references and testimonials and that, following the conviction, she demonstrated a willingness to be removed from the

Register and to not work with animals to avoid causing embarrassment to the RCVS.

Stuart Drummond said: "The Committee was of the view that the nature and seriousness of Miss Bretman's behaviour, which led to the conviction, was fundamentally incompatible with being registered as a veterinary nurse. The conduct represented a serious departure from professional standards; serious harm was deliberately caused to an animal; the continued denial of the offence demonstrated a complete lack of insight, especially in regard to the impact of her behaviour on public confidence and trust in the profession. In light of these conclusions, the Committee decided that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction was removal from the Register.

"In reaching this decision the Committee recognised the impact this was likely to have on Miss Bretman, which was unfortunate given her young age and her obvious passion for a career as a veterinary nurse. The Committee had considered with care all the positive statements made about her in the references and testimonials provided.

"However, the need to protect animal welfare, the reputation of the profession and thus the wider public interest, outweighed Miss Bretman's interests and the Committee concluded that removal was the only appropriate and proportionate sanction. The Committee determined that it was important that a clear message be sent that this sort of behaviour is wholly inappropriate and not to be tolerated. It brought discredit upon Miss Bretman and discredit upon the profession".

The Committee then directed the RCVS Registrar to remove Miss Bretman's name from the Register. Miss Bretman has 28 days from being notified of the Committee's decision to submit an appeal.



# Disciplinary Committee suspends an Oxfordshire-based vet for six months

The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) Disciplinary Committee has suspended a veterinary surgeon based in Witney, Oxfordshire from the Register for six months for failing to communicate with clients, professional colleagues and the College.

The hearing for Dr Susan Catherine Mulvey MRCVS took place on 9 and 10 May in relation to two charges against her. The first charge was that, between 9 May 2018 and 30 October 2018, she failed to provide the clinical history for an English Cocker Spaniel named Henry to the Tremain Veterinary Group, despite requests on numerous dates. Furthermore, the charge stated that between 7 August 2018 and 30 October 2018, she failed to respond adequately or at all with Henry's owners in relation to their requests for information, particularly in relation to his clinical records and details of insurance claims made for Henry by her practice.

The second charge was that, between 4 January 2019 and 19 February 2019, she failed to respond to reasonable requests from the RCVS, particularly in relation to her treatment of Henry, her continuing professional development (CPD) and the status of her Professional Indemnity Insurance. The College deleted a charge relating to Dr Mulvey failing to have in place any adequate Professional Indemnity Insurance for the period 9 May 2018 to 19 February 2019 as it had recently received confirmation that such insurance was in place.

At the beginning of the hearing, Dr Mulvey admitted the facts and conduct alleged in the charges and further admitted that as a result of her conduct when considered cumulatively she was guilty of disgraceful conduct in a professional respect. The Committee, having considered the evidence provided by the College and Dr Mulvey's admissions found all the facts and conduct to be proved.

The Committee further concluded that in relation to each individual request made by Tremain Group for Henry's records following their second request on 10 May 2019 and the requests of Henry's owners and the College for information as set out in the charges was each individually considered to be disgraceful conduct in a professional respect. The Committee considered that the charges when considered cumulatively also amounted to disgraceful conduct.

The Committee decided, in respect of the first charge, that Dr Mulvey had breached the Code of Professional Conduct for Veterinary Surgeons by failing to provide clinical records or details of insurance claims. This was an administrative part of the function of a veterinary surgeon's role and that failure to provide clients with such information was unacceptable and fell far short of acceptable professional standards. The Committee noted that Dr Mulvey's failure to provide details of insurance claims had occurred because she had not made those claims, despite offering to do so.

In respect of the second charge, the Committee concluded that Dr Mulvey's conduct in failing to respond to five requests from the College for information relating to Henry was unacceptable. The Committee also considered that the omissions took place in the context of Dr Mulvey's previous Disciplinary Committee hearing in April 2018 during which she agreed to a number of undertakings including supervision on her professional practice by an appointed supervisor. It therefore decided that her failure to provide evidence of her CPD and Professional Indemnity Insurance to the College each individually amounted to disgraceful conduct in a professional respect.

The Committee then went on to consider the sanction for Dr Mulvey in relation to the both charges that it had found proved on 9 May 2019 and also in respect of the charges it had found proved at its earlier hearing on 26 April 2018 for which sanction had been postponed for a period of 1 year to enable Dr Mulvey to comply with Undertakings she gave to the Committee to ensure that her practice met RCVS Core Standards by May 2019.

The Committee heard from Mr Stuart King MRCVS who had been appointed to act as a Workplace Supervisor for Dr Mulvey during the period of her Undertakings. Mr King provided the Committee with a report upon the extent to which Dr Mulvey had complied with the terms of her Undertakings including the extent which she had implemented Dr King's numerous recommendations. The Committee also heard from Dr Byrne MRCVS an inspector for the RCVS's voluntary Practice Standards Scheme that Dr Mulvey's practice, when inspected by him in early April 2019, had not met RCVS PSS Core standards in a number of areas.

The Committee heard from Dr Mulvey and her Counsel that she accepted that she had not met RCVS Core standards as she had undertaken to do.

In reaching its decision as to sanction for all the matters, the Committee took into account that Dr Mulvey's misconduct overall was serious because it was repeated. It also considered aggravating and mitigating factors. Aggravating factors included the fact that the misconduct was sustained or repeated over a period of time (in relation to charge 1 for a period of approximately 4 months and in relation to charge 2 for approximately 6 weeks). Other aggravating factors include the fact that Dr Mulvey's conduct contravened advice issued by the Professional Conduct Department in letters sent to her, and that she had wilfully disregarded the role of the RCVS and the systems that regulate the veterinary profession.

Mitigating factors included that: there was no harm to any animal; there was no financial gain for Dr Mulvey or any other party; there was no ulterior motive behind Dr Mulvey's conduct; and that Dr Mulvey had in fact both completed her minimum CPD requirement and secured Professional Indemnity Insurance, demonstrating that she had not attempted to hide such information from the College. It also took into account that Dr Mulvey, prior to the first Disciplinary Committee's hearing in 2018, worked without any previous disciplinary findings against her from 1976 to 2018. The Committee also noted that she had made efforts to comply with some of the undertakings.

Mr Ian Green, Chair of the DC and speaking on behalf of the Disciplinary Committee, said: "The Committee considered that a warning or reprimand was not an appropriate sanction that would meet the public interest. Instead, the Committee decided that a suspension order for a period of six months would allow Dr Mulvey sufficient time to focus on ensuring her practice met the Core Standards set out in the Practice Standards Scheme, without the daily demands of practising as a veterinary surgeon, and was a proportionate and sufficient sanction to meet the public interest. The Committee was satisfied that a period of six months met the public interest as it was sanctioning Dr Mulvey for two sets of similar misconduct which we had determined overall as serious. The Committee also believed that during these six months Dr Mulvey could reflect and reorganise her practice, and there would be little risk to animals and the public in her returning to practice."

Dr Mulvey has 28 days from being informed of the Committee's decision to lodge an appeal with the Privy Council.