

RCVS Mind Matters Research Symposium 2025

10 | YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

Programme, abstracts
and MMI Anniversary



Welcome from the Chair of Mind Matters Initiative, and RCVS Director of Mind Matters

Welcome to this very special event in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) calendar.

Every two years, we're delighted to bring together innovative researchers from across the globe to share the latest, cutting-edge research into the mental health of veterinary professionals. The symposium has always been a key focal point for MMI, but this year we celebrate an even more significant milestone – MMI's ten-year anniversary and our fifth research symposium, held on World Mental Health Day.

This is our first time in Birmingham, at the wonderful Eastside Rooms, and we wish a warm welcome to each and every one of you for what promises to be a day of enriching discussion and knowledge exchange. The theme for today is 'Advancing veterinary mental health research: learning from the past, considering the present, and looking to the future.'

Since MMI's inception in 2015, the veterinary mental health research landscape has evolved considerably. We have been working hard to support its progression, providing funding for over £155,000 worth of research grants, facilitating high quality CPD, and holding biennial symposia and hosting research webinars, among a range of other activities. We're heartened to see more and more researchers taking an interest in veterinary mental health. We've come a long way in developing our understanding of mental health in the veterinary community over the past 10 years but still have a way to go.

Only through continued collaboration with mental health researchers and clinicians and learning from other allied professions, can we efficiently work towards our shared goal of enhancing mental health and support within the veterinary community.

This is why events such as this symposium are so important. Veterinary mental health is a small but growing field of research. Creating environments for open discussion and networking are key to advancing our understanding of where

the challenges lie, promoting evidence-based best practices that keep people well at work and help to dispel unhelpful narratives and myths on mental health.

Many thanks to the MMI Team for creating such an engaging programme, and to the RCVS Communications Team for all their hard work in supporting the symposium to come to fruition. We would also like to thank Dr Rosie Allister MRCVS for her support in reviewing abstracts for the day, and for being a central source of support for all our wonderful speakers.

And thank you to you – our delegates, exhibitors and speakers – for taking the time to attend and dedicating your time to helping advance the field of veterinary mental health research. Be sure to join the conversation online and tag in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) on LinkedIn using the hashtag #MindMattersSymposium2025

Best wishes



Dr Zara Kennedy
MRCVS,
Chair of RCVS Mind
Matters Initiative, and
RCVS Council member



Angharad Belcher,
RCVS Director for
Advancement of the
Professions, and Mind
Matters Initiative

Reflecting on 10 years of the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative

When I was first asked to set up a support programme for the mental health of the veterinary team, I remember a senior vet saying to me: “It’s just a young person’s issue – we never had mental health issues in my day. You just got on with things. Of all of the veterinary colleagues I know who have killed themselves, it was usually something other than mental health that was the problem.”

I remember being stunned for so many reasons. For a start it made me very sad that someone would be in a position to know even one colleague who had taken their own life, let alone a larger number, and to refer to that fact so casually. And that sense that mental health issues were a generational issue. And the idea that a veterinary professional couldn’t possibly have mental health issues in the first place. And... and... I could go on.

But it gives you a sense of how different things were just ten or so years ago.

Scroll forward to a decade since Mind Matters was launched, and mental health and wellbeing is on the agenda at every major veterinary conference, at home and, to an increasing extent, overseas. Mental health-related tools and training is accessible to all. Prominent people within the profession are open about their mental health issues and encourage others to seek help. Support services are more widely used. The profession has collaborated on the issue rather than seeking to apportion blame.

Of course, it would be overweening to say that Mind Matters made all this happen. Far from it. Thankfully, there has been a positive change in the way that mental health is discussed and supported right across society, the professions included. But it is true to say that the Mind Matters Initiative, especially being led by the Royal College, cleared the way for the conversation, pioneered new approaches, and gave a serious push to progress on mental health and wellbeing. We brought the funding, the focus, and the fervour to make a change.

With our three-pronged approach of ‘prevention, protection and support’, Mind Matters has been careful not just to put a sticking plaster on the problem, but to try to make systemic changes. But mental health and wellbeing is far from ‘done’. And that’s what today is all about: really understanding the issues so that there is an ever-increasing research base for those seeking

to develop evidence-based solutions to draw upon and for us to work together to make a difference to the lives of those working in the professions.

The RCVS led the way in terms of professional regulators stepping up to their role in supporting the mental health of their registrants: acknowledging that this was in the public interest, and that even though regulators have a reputation for causing stress, this didn’t mean they couldn’t take an active part in addressing the issues. In fact, when I became CEO, I brought this challenge into the heart of all that we do. Our compassionate regulator strategy not only looked at how to do things compassionately, but what we needed to do to be compassionate. It’s a subtle difference but such a combined approach leads to longer term change.

So, a huge thank you to everyone who has been with us on this path to progress. The MMI chairs – Neil Smith, Stuart Reid, Susan Dawson, Kate Richards, Louise Allum and Zara Kennedy. The fabulous staff team, taskforce members and supporters. The experts we have been lucky enough to be able to call upon for training, content and education. All of you have played a part in putting mental health and wellbeing on the veterinary map and supporting the veterinary team to not just ‘get on with things,’ but to make things better. But we’re not done yet. We still have a long way to go to ensure that everyone in the veterinary community is thriving and feels supported. As we move forward, we’ll continue to draw upon our values of compassion, collaboration and courage and ask for your continued support in helping us to make a positive difference.



Lizzie Lockett
RCVS Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

Friday 10 October 2025 | Birmingham

MMI Research Symposium 2025: Programme

MORNING

From 9.00am	Arrival, registration and refreshments
10.00am	Welcome, opening remarks and reflecting on 10 years of the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative Lizzie Lockett, RCVS Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
10.30am	Recent developments from MMI RCVS MMI, and Diversity and Inclusion Teams <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applied mental health science series• Managing mental health in the workplace course• Suicide awareness fundamentals course• Let's talk adjustments campaign
11.00am	Morning refreshment break, poster presentations and networking
11.30am	Morning research talks Session introduction Chaired by Angharad Belcher, RCVS Director for Advancement of the Professions, and Mind Matters Initiative <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mental health education in veterinary nursing curricula: a multivocality qualitative study of further and higher education Dr Jackie Hargreaves and Dr Faye Didymus, Leeds Beckett University, UK• Mental health, alcohol use behaviours and barriers to help seeking within UK veterinary practice: the MAB-VET study Dr Jennifer Seddon and Dr Olivia Cormier MRCVS, Oxford Brookes University, UK• Nursing matters: a mixed-methods study of workplace mental health in UK veterinary nurses and nursing students Dr Naomi King, Research Assistant, Royal Veterinary College, UK• "For three of my four miscarriages, I was at work": workplace management of UK veterinary professionals' miscarriage, infertility and assisted fertility (MIAF) Dr Zoe Belshaw FRCVS, Consultant, EviVet Research Consultancy, UK

AFTERNOON

12.55-13.55pm	Lunch break, poster presentations and networking
13.55pm	<p>Afternoon research talks</p> <p>Session introduction Chaired by Dr Zara Kennedy MRCVS, Chair of RCVS Mind Matters Initiative, and RCVS Council member</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confronting taken-for-granted truths - a systematic review of risk and protective factors associated with suicide risk in veterinary professionals James Glass MRCVS, Postgraduate Researcher (PhD), University of Glasgow, UK • Organisational contributors and intervention strategies to address burnout in veterinary nurses Angela Chapman RVN, Senior Lecturer in Veterinary Nursing, La Trobe University, Australia • Staff experiences of teaching neurodivergent veterinary students in clinical learning environments Dr Kirstie Pickles MRCVS, EDI Lead, Harper-Keele Veterinary School, UK • How does attendance at Schwartz Rounds impact veterinary professionals' experience in clinical practice? Dr Emma Ormandy MRCVS, Head of Veterinary Education, University of Liverpool, UK
15.20pm	Afternoon refreshment break, poster presentations and networking
15.55pm	<p>Mental health research grant recipients 2025 Angharad Belcher</p>
16.05pm	<p>Summary and closing remarks Lizzie Lockett</p>
16.30pm-18.00pm	Anniversary celebration and networking

Mental health support

We will regularly signpost to a range of support services throughout the day.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or need support at any point during the event, please speak to a member of the MMI Team. You can also visit the designated wellbeing space to take a break. Mental Health First Aiders will be visible with green

lanyards. You are not alone - help is here if you need it.

Should you require support after today's event, we encourage you to reach out to a GP or a trusted source of support, such as **Vetlife** on **0303 040 2552** or **Samaritans** on **116 123**.

Further information on support services can also be found on page 29 of this booklet.

CHAIRS AND PLENARY SPEAKERS

Dr Zara Kennedy
MRCVS,
Chair of RCVS Mind
Matters Initiative, and
RCVS Council member

Zara graduated from the University of Liverpool in 2010 and went on to build her career in Emergency and Critical Care (ECC). Alongside her clinical work, she has completed a master's degree in Patient Safety and Clinical Human Factors, giving her a strong foundation in understanding how systems, teamwork, and culture influence both patient outcomes and professional wellbeing. She is passionate about supporting and advancing the veterinary profession, with a particular focus on wellbeing, patient safety, and creating positive working cultures.



Angharad Belcher, RCVS
Director for Advancement
of the Professions, and
Mind Matters Initiative

Angharad is both the RCVS Director for Advancement of the Professions, and the Mind Matters Initiative. She recognises the interconnectedness of all areas of animal health and the different impacts that this has on veterinary professionals' wellbeing. Since joining MMI she has tried to bring the community together to increase opportunities for discussion on a wide range of issues, from menopause and climate change anxiety, to grief and chronic health, to name a few. Angharad and her team aim to ensure that important topics are always viewed from an intersectional perspective, making space for lesser heard voices, and with an evidence base where possible.



Lizzie Lockett,
RCVS Chief Executive
Officer (CEO)

Lizzie joined the RCVS in February 2005 as Head of Communications, and later became Director of Strategic Communications. In these roles, Lizzie and her team were responsible for all of the College's communications, including media, publications, events, web and digital, design and public affairs. Lizzie was also responsible for managing the RCVS side of the joint RCVS/British Veterinary Association project, Vet Futures. In autumn 2014, Lizzie set up the Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) and she was appointed RCVS CEO in November 2017. Lizzie is also a trustee of the Mental Health Foundation.



RESEARCH TALKS - MORNING

Mental health education in veterinary nursing curricula: a multivocality qualitative study of further and higher education

Dr Faye Didymus,
Reader in Sport and Performance Psychology
Dr Jackie Hargreaves, Senior Lecturer in Sport and Exercise Psychology, Leeds Beckett University, UK

Faye is a reader in sport and performance psychology in the Carnegie School of Sport and Co-Director for Postgraduate Research Degrees in the same school. She is a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA), a Fellow of the Chartered Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (FCASES), a Chartered Association of Sport and Exercise Science (CASES) Accredited Sport and Exercise Scientist, and a Science Council Chartered Scientist (CSci). Since 2009, Faye has developed a progressive programme of research that focuses on human welfare.



Jackie is a senior lecturer in sport and exercise psychology at Leeds Beckett University. She is a Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) registered health psychologist, a British Psychological Society (BPS) Chartered Psychologist and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA). Her research focuses on physical activity and mental health for a variety of population groups. Jackie has also made contributions to applied exercise psychology, particularly in the design and implementation of behaviour change interventions aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles.



Abstract

Mental health among veterinary nurses is essential for job satisfaction, retention, and performance (cf. Vivian et al., 2022). One way to support nurses' mental health and prevent mental ill-health is by integrating mental health education into veterinary nursing curricula. This study addressed paucities in understanding by executing a review of mental health education during further and higher education veterinary learning pathways. The review was complemented by interviews with tutors, veterinary nurse students, and qualified veterinary nurses to explore their experiences of mental health education. The team conducted 28 online interviews that focused on the delivery of mental health content and broader curriculum and placement factors that impact mental health.

Using template analysis, we used the review and interview data to develop five themes that encapsulate the headline findings:

1. taught content that contributes to students' mental health;
2. assessment of curricula content that focuses on students' mental health;
3. the academic environment;
4. mental health support provision whilst studying; and,
5. placement environments and students' mental health experiences.

The study culminated in a set of evidence-based recommendations for educational enhancement that relate to:

1. improvements to taught curricula content;
2. training and support for veterinary nurses, educators, surgeons, and practice managers;
3. mental health and (dis)ability assessment during students' education;
4. development of communities of wellbeing practice; and,
5. enhancements to policies and processes in universities and veterinary practices.

These recommendations are currently being used by the RCVS and the MMI to inform and improve education and practice for veterinary nurses.

RESEARCH TALKS - MORNING

Mental health, alcohol use behaviours and barriers to help seeking within UK veterinary practice: The MAB-VET study

Dr Jennifer Seddon

Senior Lecturer in Psychology

Dr Olivia Cormier MRCVS

Research Associate, Oxford Brookes University, UK

Olivia graduated from the University of Bristol in 2011 and worked for 12 years as an equine vet during which time she completed a Psychology MSc at Oxford Brookes University and graduated with distinction in 2023. Subsequently she published her dissertation project 'Alcohol-related Stigma within the UK Veterinary Profession,' as first author. She is currently working as a research associate at Oxford Brookes University ahead of commencing a PhD in understanding mental health, alcohol use and barriers to help seeking within the UK veterinary sector, with a focus on co-development of intervention strategies.



Jennifer is Assistant Director for the Centre for Psychological Research and Senior Lecturer in Psychology at Oxford Brookes University. Her research focuses on alcohol, illicit drug use and prescription medication dependence. Her most recent research has focused on ways to improve the experience of care for people prescribed medication with a risk of dependence, the use of alcohol in mid-life and older adults, and mental health and drinking within the veterinary profession. She has expertise in the use of mixed-methods, co-production and participatory research approaches. Jennifer



is an editorial board member for the journal *Advances in Dual Diagnosis*.

Abstract

Background: Evidence from research conducted in 2009 shows that a higher proportion of UK veterinarians consume alcohol at risky levels compared to the general population. Research highlights the negative impact of alcohol use on mental health within UK veterinarians, with stigma and concerns of adverse career implications identified as potential help-seeking barriers. To address these challenges, better understanding of the relationships between mental health, alcohol use and help-seeking barriers amongst UK veterinary workers is needed.

Aims: To understand the factors associated with harmful and hazardous drinking and how to support help-seeking for alcohol use among UK veterinary workers.

Method: An exploratory cross-sectional online survey for UK veterinary workers who had consumed alcohol within the past three months. The survey was developed in collaboration with a public advisory group. Data was collected on alcohol use (AUDIT), drinking motives (DMQ-A), mental health (K6; SWEMWBS) and factors for alcohol-related help-seeking (COM-B). Results: A total of 652 responses were included in analysis (male n= 80, 12.3%, female n= 570, 87.6%) and consisted of 62% vets (n= 402), 30% veterinary nurses (n= 198) and 8% 'other' veterinary roles (n= 51). Just over 40% of participants (n = 263) were at risk of alcohol-related harm (increasing risk: n = 212, 32.6%; higher risk: n = 34, 5.2%; possible dependence: n = 17, 2.6%). Greater risk of alcohol-related harm was associated with being male, identifying as a man, and older age. Poor mental health and drinking for enhancement or to cope was predictive of greater alcohol-related harm. Increased self-worth, positive attitudes toward seeking help, increased awareness of available resources, and greater confidence in accessing them all positively influenced help-seeking behaviour. Factors that contributed to reduced alcohol consumption included adopting a healthier lifestyle, peer support, the ability to resist drinking in alcohol-related settings, and the use of healthy coping strategies.

Conclusion: Poor mental health and drinking to cope were associated with increased risk of alcohol-related harm. Interventions targeting alcohol use in this population need to take into account mental health more broadly. Veterinary workplace strategies should focus on improving awareness of and confidence in, help-seeking resources; fostering more positive attitudes towards help-seeking, and promoting healthy coping strategies.

Nursing matters: a mixed-methods study of workplace mental health in UK veterinary nurses and nursing students

Dr Naomi King

Research Assistant, Royal Veterinary College, UK

Naomi has a PhD in psychology from Oxford Brookes University and has been working at the Royal Veterinary College since 2021. She has engaged in multiple interdisciplinary projects with real-world applications, and her research focuses primarily on issues of identity and mental health. She specialises in qualitative methods and analysis of interview data, and has co-authored a number of papers published in peer-reviewed journals, alongside stakeholder reports.



Abstract

Naomi's interprofessional and interdisciplinary research team conducted a mixed-methods study of mental health in registered veterinary nurses (RVNs) and student veterinary nurses (SVNs) in the UK, funded by the IDEXX Foundation, following an initial

scoping review (King et al., 2024) that highlighted a lack of robust research on the topic.

The overarching aim of the study was to contribute to the evidence base informing the development of supportive clinical teams. The research question was 'To what extent, and why, do UK RVNs and SVNs experience poor mental health?'. Objectives were to assess the prevalence of poor mental health in these populations using a survey, and to explore participants' work-related experiences in more depth via interviews.

A questionnaire-based survey combining validated psychological tools and bespoke questions was promoted to UK-based RVNs and SVNs in 2023. Valid responses were received from 669 respondents. The majority were female (96.8%), RVNs (74.0%), and aged 20–39 (79.5%). Eighteen respondents (15 RVNs and 3 SVNs; 14 female and 4 male; aged 24–63) subsequently participated in semi-structured interviews, which were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Survey respondents had poorer mental health than the general UK population; almost half gave responses consistent with probable clinical depression, while depression, anxiety, and stress scores were moderately severe. Two interpretive themes were constructed from interview data to reflect key concepts in interviewees' accounts of how their occupation or training affected their mental health. The first was an internal struggle against an innate tendency to commit their entire identities to their work. The second was an uncomfortable dissonance between their own positive perceptions of their professional identity (for example, highly trained, competent) and other people's apparent negative perceptions (for example, low-status, low-skilled).

To the best of their knowledge, this was the first study to examine workplace mental health in RVNs and SVNs on a large scale, supported by in-depth interviews. Findings highlight the need for further research in this area, and are being used to develop a practical tool to help RVNs and SVNs monitor and manage their mental health.

RESEARCH TALKS - MORNING

“For three of my four miscarriages, I was at work”: workplace management of UK veterinary professionals’ miscarriage, infertility and assisted fertility (MIAF)

Dr Zoe Belshaw FRCVS
Consultant, EviVet
Research Consultancy, UK



Zoe is a veterinary surgeon with a clinical specialism in small animal internal medicine. She received a PhD from the University of Nottingham in 2017 for investigating welfare assessment in canine osteoarthritis, and was awarded the BSAVA Petsavers Award in 2020. She has worked in general practice, referral clinics, university teaching hospitals and charity practice. She is currently combining looking after a young child with collaborative research on how veterinary professionals and owners make decisions about pets, particularly those with chronic illness, characterising the pandemic puppy phenomenon and understanding veterinary professionals’ experiences of infertility and pregnancy loss.

Abstract

Introduction: Veterinary professionals may be at increased risk of miscarriage, infertility (Schenker et al., 1990; Shirangi et al., 2008), and subsequent mental health disorders (Shen et al., 2024). The mental health burden affecting UK veterinary professionals (Bartram et al., 2009), and problems with workforce retention (Hagen et al., 2020) are well evidenced. However, the impact of UK veterinary workplaces on individuals experiencing miscarriage, infertility and/or assisted fertility (MIAF) is unknown.

Research question: What are UK veterinary professionals’ experiences of, and impacts from, workplace management of MIAF?

Objective: To collect and analyse qualitative survey data from UK veterinary professionals’ about workplace management of their MIAF experiences

Methods: From April-June 2024, an online questionnaire collected responses from UK-resident veterinary professionals about how experience(s) of MIAF had been managed in their workplace. Free text data describing positive and negative aspects of those experiences, and recommendations for improvement, were coded in Microsoft Excel and thematically analysed.

Results: 525 UK veterinary professionals provided eligible responses, 96% of whom were female. They described 671 experiences: 484 (72.1%) miscarriages; 224 (33.4%) infertility; and 158 (23.5%) assisted fertility.

Most felt their workplace culture, aspects of their caseload, and/or thoughtless communication from management or colleagues had negatively impacted their MIAF experiences (“As a vet I found infertility very hard to deal with. Infertile cows are sent to kill.”). MIAF-relevant policy appeared rare and was typically considered inadequate; multiple individuals were penalised for, or unable to take leave after, or even during, pregnancy loss (“I...was required to work my duty weekend during which I miscarried in the toilet in between emergency calls”). Many respondents described long-lasting negative impacts of their MIAF experience(s) on their mental health, and/or damaged workplace relationships. Colleagues’ support, a phased return to work, and adequate leave were valued. Respondents identified a need for education on the physical and mental health impacts of MIAF, access to counselling, better risk assessments, and clear, accessible MIAF workplace policies.

Discussion: MIAF appears poorly managed in many veterinary settings, with negative impacts on individuals’ mental health and job satisfaction. Urgent improvement is needed; this research identifies how change can be effected.

RESEARCH TALKS - AFTERNOON

Confronting taken-for-granted truths – a systematic review of risk and protective factors associated with suicide risk in veterinary professionals

James Glass MRCVS
Postgraduate Researcher
(PhD), University of
Glasgow, UK



James qualified from the Royal Veterinary College in 1992 and worked in clinical practice until 2019. In 2022 he completed an MSc in the neuroscience and psychology of mental health, with a dissertation on the shame and stigma around disclosing mental ill-health in the veterinary field. He is currently a doctoral researcher at the Suicidal Behaviour Research Lab at the University of Glasgow, where his PhD explores suicide risk among veterinary professionals. His research integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to better understand risk and protective factors for suicide. The goal is to inform practical interventions for reducing suicide risk among veterinary professionals, including vets, nurses, and students.

Abstract

Suicide risk among veterinary professionals is elevated in many countries (Bartram & Baldwin, 2008). Factors influencing risk have been debated (Tomasi et al., 2019) but rigorous examination is lacking. There have been no comprehensive reviews of this area for almost two decades. During this period the veterinary profession has undergone rapid, significant change.

This review seeks to address scarcity of current data, examine prevalence of suicidal ideation and behaviour in all veterinary professionals, and synthesis existing literature

examining the psychosocial factors which may increase, or protect against, suicidal ideation and behaviour.

A protocol was registered on PROSPERO (CRD42023394934). Six academic databases were searched following Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. A date restriction captured studies from 2008 to 2024. Studies were quality assessed using established criteria.

Some 494 papers were identified and 49 full-text articles were eligible for inclusion. Research among veterinary nurses and technicians is largely absent. 60% of studies were conducted in North America or the UK and 12-month prevalence for suicidal ideation ranged from 20-34%. Death by suicide data was limited to eight countries, consistently indicating elevated risk compared to the general population. Methods of suicide highlight self-poisoning as a concern, often involving drugs diverted from work. Possible risk factors included levels of psychological distress and work-related factors. Performing euthanasia is often considered a risk factor (Dalum et al., 2024) but these studies yielded conflicting results. Possible protective factors include work-life balance, stress management and workplace culture. Overall protective factors were not widely researched.

Papers considering death by suicide presented a variety of estimates, and synthesis was hampered by significant heterogeneity in comparator populations and reporting across studies. There is considerable heterogeneity across all studies with a range of established psychological measures evaluated alongside less reliable, researcher-designed, single-item questions. Only three studies had any longitudinal component, limiting the ability to draw causal inferences.

This review advances our understanding of suicide risk in veterinary professionals, highlights the need for further research, particularly among nurses and technicians and identifies the challenge of developing consistent research approaches in seeking to obtain key evidence-based answers in this under-researched population. There is a clear need for prospective study designs to establish temporal associations.

RESEARCH TALKS - AFTERNOON

Organisational contributors and intervention strategies to address burnout in veterinary nurses

Angela Chapman RVN

Senior Lecturer in Veterinary Nursing, La Trobe University, Australia

Angela, originally from the UK, qualified as a veterinary nurse in 2003. After nine years in general practice, she moved to Australia, working in emergency and critical care (ECC) and leadership roles while she completed her Veterinary Technician Specialist qualification in ECC. In 2016, Angela joined the teaching team for the Bachelor of Veterinary Nursing at La Trobe University in Melbourne. Alongside her teaching, she developed a passion for leadership, completing a master's in management. Angela is dedicated to the advancement and support of veterinary nurses and is currently completing a PhD focused on preventing burnout in veterinary nurses.



Abstract

Burnout, defined as a response to chronic workplace stress (WHO, 2023), is increasingly reported in veterinary nurses (VNs) (Ashton-James & McNeillage, 2022; Foote, 2023). Research to date has focused primarily on burnout in veterinarians (Brscic et al., 2021), with limited studies exploring VN experiences or organisational burnout management strategies (Chapman et al., 2024; Steffey et al., 2023). Burnout has been linked with physical and mental ill-health (Salvagioni et al., 2017), as well as intention to leave

the profession (Rohlf et al., 2022). Identifying and addressing burnout contributors, therefore, is necessary to promote wellness and professional sustainability of VNs.

This research explored burnout and its unique organisational risk and protective factors in VNs and developed best practice workplace intervention strategies.

In a series of studies, the team first systematically reviewed the existing literature exploring organisational contributors to burnout. They then conducted an anonymous, online survey of 187 qualified VNs across nine countries to measure burnout profiles (Maslach & Leiter, 2016) and workplace contributors to burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). A Delphi study sought feedback from 32 international VN leadership or burnout experts, gaining their insights on perceived barriers, enablers, and management strategies to address the problems and protective factors identified in the survey.

It was found that VNs have high levels of burnout compared with other professionals and were at high risk of developing burnout. 10 key organisational problems, including high workloads and lack of support, and three protective factors, including communication and recognition, were identified. Barriers to addressing these problems included lack of time, poor leadership training and support, and workforce shortages. Enablers included positive workplace culture and industry education initiatives. Based on these findings, proposed guidelines include a focus on upskilling and support for leaders, streamlining workflow systems and utilising admin technology to allow increased clinical utilisation of VNs, and underpinning these strategies with clear policies and transparent workplace culture.

This research provides clear evidence-based strategies to address organisational burnout contributors tailored to the unique and valuable work carried out by VNs. Implementation of these strategies has the potential to reduce burnout risk, promote wellbeing and sustainability in the profession.

RESEARCH TALKS - AFTERNOON

Staff experiences of teaching neurodivergent veterinary students in clinical learning environments

Dr Kirstie Pickles MRCVS

EDI Lead, Harper and Keele Veterinary School, UK

Kirstie is an AuDHD equine medicine specialist. She is passionate about teaching and learning, resulting in a PhD, PG Certificate in Counselling Skills, Mental Health First Aid instructor training, National Autism Trainer training, and a coaching qualification. Her company, Unedited Minds, provides workplace neurodiversity and mental health training and coaching for neurodivergent individuals. Kirstie is EDI Lead at Harper Keele Veterinary School and a trustee of Vetlife. She has published widely including MMI-funded research on workplace stressors of autistic vets. She is currently working with the RCVS on recommendations for supporting neurodivergent vet and vet nurse students.



Abstract

There is growing evidence that neurodivergent students may face additional barriers within clinical learning environments (CLEs), which can be fast paced with competing commercial interests (Morris and Turnbull 2006; Godfrey-Harris and Shaw 2023; Shaw et al. 2023; Pickles and Hollis 2025). Understanding the experiences of both students and CLE staff is a prerequisite to providing better student support.

Research question: What are the experiences and opinions of staff teaching neurodivergent veterinary students in CLEs?

Staff teaching in CLEs were invited to participate in an online survey and follow-up semi-structured interviews regarding their experiences teaching neurodivergent students. Survey analysis was performed using a mixed-method approach. Thematic analysis of interview transcripts was performed.

Survey responses were received from 32 clinical rotation staff (farm animal n=13, small animal n=10, equine n=9). Almost all participants agreed or strongly agreed that neurodivergent students may require additional support in CLEs. Less than half the participants (n=13, 41%) thought they could adequately support neurodivergent students, and almost all agreed or strongly agreed (n=28, 87%) that they would benefit from additional training, however, only 32% (n=10) had undertaken this. Staff workload was cited as the main barrier to providing additional support. Additionally, large student group sizes were reported to hinder staff understanding of individual student needs. Some participants considered that sufficient support was available and expected inherent student-centred, not environmental, adjustments.

12 staff participated in interviews (small animal n=6, 2 each of farm, equine, mixed). Dyslexia was considered the best understood, and autism the least understood and accepted, neurodivergent condition. Negative neurodivergent concepts were cited by three quarters of interviewees including 'communication challenges', 'learning differences', 'challenges with the structure and expectations of clinical rotations', 'mental and physical impacts', 'over-stimulation', 'lack of support', 'stigma', and 'negative feedback'. Only one participant mentioned positive neurodivergent traits. Barriers to undertaking training included time constraints, workload, negative attitudes towards training, a lack of neurodiversity-specific and CLE relevant training and challenges in implementing training.

Most staff recognised that neurodivergent students may need additional support in CLEs, but many had not engaged with neurodiversity training, with lack of specific resources and insufficient protected time frequently described barriers.

RESEARCH TALKS - AFTERNOON

How does attendance at Schwartz Rounds impact veterinary professionals experience in clinical practice?

Dr Emma Ormandy MRCVS

Head of Veterinary Education, University of Liverpool, UK

Emma graduated from the University of Glasgow and worked in small animal primary care practice prior to joining the University of Liverpool where she completed her PhD. Emma is currently Head of Veterinary Education at the University of Liverpool where she combines teaching veterinary professional and clinical skills with pedagogic research centring around student progression and remediation; development of reflective capability and wellbeing and inclusion within the veterinary profession.



Abstract

Introduction: Schwartz Rounds were first introduced to the UK veterinary profession through an RCVS MMI pilot project trailing the concept across seven different veterinary organisations, with the University of Liverpool being one such location. Although prevalent throughout the NHS, and with a growing body of literature stating the benefits of Schwartz Rounds in human healthcare provision (Maben et al., 2021), the impact of veterinary professionals attending Schwartz Rounds had never been evaluated. With the plethora of challenges facing the veterinary profession, any organisational intervention that could help support staff wellbeing should be explored and ultimately studied to provide evidence to its claims.

Research question and aims/objectives: In what ways does attendance at Schwartz Rounds impact the experience of veterinary professionals working in clinical practice? Are the proven benefits of Schwartz Rounds in human healthcare translatable to those working in the veterinary profession?

Methods: Ten veterinary professionals (RVN and MRCVS) who had attended two or more Schwartz Rounds whilst working in clinical practice were interviewed to explore their experience of interacting with the initiative. Interview transcripts were processed via reflective thematic analysis and subsequent coding to generate three broad themes (Braun & Clarke., 2019).

Results/findings and limitations: Three themes were generated; 'Enabling Compassion', 'Empowering Vulnerability' and 'Enhance Organisational Insight'. Attendees were able to show compassion to colleagues through shared understanding and flattening of hierarchy, but were also given permission to show self-compassion. By witnessing colleagues and in particular, senior colleagues showcase vulnerabilities during personal reflections, this empowered attendees to be vulnerable in the workplace. Finally, Schwartz Rounds are counter-cultural and offer a safe space to reflect on the emotional aspects of the work we partake in. By attending Schwartz Rounds, there is greater insight into the workings of an organisation, as well as understanding that non-attendees may require alternative workplace wellbeing initiatives that allow them to emotionally interact in means other than group reflective spaces.

Discussion/conclusions: There is evidence to show that Schwartz Rounds positively impact the working conditions of veterinary professionals in clinical practice and lead to change in workplace culture via shared understanding, improved colleague relationships and ultimately improved client and patient care.

POSTER PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Developing a stress risk management plan for residents in training: reflections from the first phase of an action research occupational health initiative

Dr Glen Cousquer MRCVS

Lecturer and Programme Coordinator, University of Edinburgh, UK

Glen's career has spanned clinical practice and higher education. He holds two MSc degrees in education and a PhD in geography, focusing on awareness-based systems change for animal welfare. He is currently a lecturer and MSc programme coordinator in One Health and conservation medicine at the University of Edinburgh where he is also Chair of the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies Mental Health and Wellbeing Committee, and Joint Unions Health and Safety Representative. He has recently completed a diploma in occupational health and safety with a particular focus on mental health literacy and how organisations and society can develop awareness-based practices to better meet the interconnected mental health and planetary health crises we face.



Abstract

Residency training programmes can be highly stressful endeavours with the potential to exact a heavy toll on the mental health of those involved (Chigerwe et al., 2021; Langley-Evans, 2023; Petersen et al., 2021).

The University of Edinburgh has invested significant resources in the development of student support services and is also committed to bringing wellbeing and mental health into the curriculum as part of the Curriculum Transformation Project. These represent some of the elements of a public health approach to student mental health (Besse et al., 2021); there has, however, been little work undertaken to integrate occupational health approaches into such work, despite the fact that they are specifically designed to manage work-related health risks (Calvet et al., 2021; Cousquer, 2023; Davis and Morganson, 2019; Taubman and Parikh, 2023).

A working group at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies (R(D)SVS) was therefore established to initiate and develop a participatory action research project to safeguard resident wellbeing. The research question considered here explores how veterinary teaching organisations can approach the challenge of managing stress in resident training programmes using the recommended Health and Safety Executive (HSE) approaches.

This presentation reports on the iterative learning that has allowed the team to develop a pilot project that will allow work, worker and organisational hazards and risks to be better understood and managed. Key findings arising from the development of stress risk assessments, stress indicator tools, exit interviews and proposals for a mental health training course highlight the need to build trust and address barriers to engagement through collaboration and co-creation.

At an organisational systems level, these can be viewed as deep listening challenges where the attentional qualities and listening skills brought to the project are easily overlooked but crucially important. Piloting initiatives, actively seeking and integrating feedback, creating opportunities and safe spaces for individuals to express their concerns, all help to evolve organisational culture.

POSTER PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Enhancing veterinary workplace wellbeing through coaching: evaluation of the 2024 VetJoy Voucher Programme

Dr Wiebke Jansen

Veterinary Policy Officer, Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), Belgium

Wiebke received her veterinary degree from the University of Veterinary Medicine in Hannover (Germany) in 2010. After ten years in research and diagnostics on food-borne zoonotic pathogens, she completed her PhD and became a European Board of Veterinary Specialisation (EBVS) specialist in veterinary public health in 2017. At FVE, she is Veterinary Policy Officer and focuses on animal health and welfare, and the mental wellbeing of veterinarians, including the working group on mental wellbeing, diversity, equity, and inclusiveness and the VetJoy platform and initiatives, such as the team coaching vouchers and the Great Veterinary Workplace Award. This work led to several publications on these topics.



Abstract

Veterinary professionals across Europe face increasing stress, burnout, and challenges in workplace cohesion, which can undermine clinical care and staff retention. In response, the Federation of Veterinarians of Europe (FVE), supported by a grant from the Zoetis Foundation, implemented the Workplace Coaching Voucher Programme to strengthen

veterinary teams through targeted workplace coaching.

This survey evaluated the impact of coaching interventions delivered to 19 veterinary workplaces across eight European countries in 2024. Participants, comprising both clinical and official veterinary teams, completed structured pre-coaching and post-coaching surveys assessing communication, team cohesion, workload management, conflict resolution, and overall workplace wellbeing. Data from matched responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, with changes measured via median score comparisons.

Before coaching, 58% of participants had prior exposure to coaching, and 90% expressed no concerns about participation. Key expectations included improvements in communication (41%) and team cohesion (36%). Pre-coaching challenges identified included poor team collaboration (30%) and unresolved conflict (23%).

Following the coaching sessions, 90% of respondents reported high satisfaction. Statistically notable improvements were observed in communication (49%), with 100% of teams reporting improved workload management. Work-life balance promotion and workplace physical comfort also showed significant gains. Furthermore, 79% of participants affirmed that coaching clarified organisational goals and facilitated internal alignment. Importantly, 26% of respondents spontaneously expressed interest in repeating or expanding coaching activities.

The programme's success suggested that coaching can be an effective and scalable tool to enhance team dynamics, reduce workplace-related stress, and promote sustainable workplace cultures in veterinary settings. It also highlighted the value of non-clinical interventions in addressing systemic workforce challenges and improving the quality of care. The workplace coaching programme will continue in 2025 with a broadened scope and a special emphasis on non-clinical workplaces.

Widening participation or widening the gap? Experiences of Muslim students at veterinary schools: a thematic analysis

Dr Adeel Khan MRCVS

**Clinical Assistant Professor in Equine Internal
Medicine, University of Nottingham, UK**

Adeel graduated from the University of Nottingham and completed an equine internship and an equine internal medicine residency in Australia. Since 2022, Adeel has returned to the University of Nottingham as a specialist in equine medicine. He splits his time between curriculum management, clinical teaching and provides a referral service at Pool House Equine Hospital. Adeel also has strong relationships with EDI and affinity groups with a focus on enhancing Muslim experiences in the veterinary profession through advocacy and awareness. Through this he has founded the Veterinary Muslim Fellowship – a supportive community group for Muslim veterinarians, nurses, and students.



Abstract

Introduction: With increasing pressures to increase diversity within the veterinary profession, there are numerous initiatives to drive widening participation. Students of faith may come across challenges and have different experiences during their veterinary education and in their professional careers. Due to course related factors, Muslims may find additional challenges

in practicing their faith and completing their veterinary education.

Research question: What are the experiences of Muslim veterinary students in the UK?

Aims: To identify key themes relating to the experiences of Muslim veterinary students. This will improve our understanding and allow effective measures to be put in place as well as reinforce current measures that improve the experiences of Muslim veterinary students.

Methods: Students currently in veterinary education volunteered to be recruited into the study. Semi-structured I:I interviews were conducted either face-to-face or via teleconferencing. The interviews were then transcribed, codes generated with NVivo and thematic analysis was performed to identify key themes.

Results: Six semi-structured interviews were performed. Students ranged from all years of the undergraduate course. Four main themes were derived: identity and integration; religious observance and adjustments; guidance and education; and sensing discrimination. Within these themes, it was evident that students enjoyed the course and its content. However, they lack a sense of belonging, find it difficult to integrate, find awkwardness in asking for adjustments and have difficulties in practising their religion within the university and curriculum setting.

Conclusion: This data can be used to collaborate with key educators and implement strategies during key times of the year to improve the experience of Muslim veterinary students and build a supportive community.

POSTER PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

Moral dissonance in veterinary educators

Hamish Morrin RVN

Lecturer in Clinical Communication Skills, University of Lancashire, UK

Hamish is an RVN with a strong interest in ethics and values, especially relating to moral injury and values conflict resolution. He has an MSc in international animal welfare, ethics and law, a certificate in veterinary human support, and is currently enrolled in an EdD at University College London (UCL).



Abstract

Moral dissonance, in the workplace context, can be described as the experience of finding one's own standards of moral behaviour to have been violated by one's colleagues and/or the institution within which one is employed (Te Brake & Nauta, 2022). Moral dissonance and issues related to it (for example, compassion fatigue, moral injury, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)) have been identified in veterinary

professionals (Williamson et al., 2022), medical educators (Berger, 2014) and lecturers (Ganske, 2010). However, the possible experience of moral dissonance has not been examined in veterinary educators. This study explores the experience of moral dissonance in UK veterinary educators and provides suggestions for further research.

This was a qualitative phenomenological study utilising thematic analysis of interviews. The aim of the research was to examine the events (if any) that caused moral dissonance in veterinary educators, and what factors the participants felt had exacerbated or mitigated the experience. Snowball sampling of veterinary lecturers, initially via LinkedIn and personal contacts but with encouragement to share more widely, yielded six interviewees. Each took part in a semi-structured interview via Microsoft Teams, which were transcribed and pseudonymised, then analysed using the process of thematic analysis described by Braun & Clarke (2022). NVivo 14 was used for this process.

After multiple iterations of analysis, four common themes emerged. They were professional responsibility, betrayal, moral community and animal welfare. Each of these themes were congruent with moral dissonance described for veterinary professionals, educators generally and/or medical professionals. While a qualitative study of this size is not generalisable, it does suggest that these issues do exist in veterinary educators and that mitigation approaches from related fields may be valuable in preventing or limiting harm.

Transformational leadership as a buffer against stress and emotional exhaustion in UK veterinary professionals

Roanneth (Chawi) Slater-Brown RVN

Associate Lecturer in Psychology, University of Wolverhampton, UK

Roanneth (Chawi) is

a part-time associate lecturer in psychology at the University of Wolverhampton, delivering online postgraduate teaching. Her research, conducted at the university as part of her MSc in organisational psychology, explored how transformational leadership influences occupational stress and emotional exhaustion in UK veterinary professionals. With a professional background in veterinary nursing, equine care, and business management, she is particularly interested in workplace wellbeing and leadership. Chawi is keen to connect with like-minded researchers working at the intersection of mental health, leadership, and the veterinary profession.



Abstract

Veterinary professionals face occupational stressors such as ethical dilemmas, long working hours, and emotional burdens associated with animal care. These stressors contribute to high levels of emotional exhaustion, a key component of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Transformational leadership, characterised by individualised support, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation (Burns, 1978; Bass & Riggio, 2006), has demonstrated potential to influence workplace stress and employee wellbeing in human healthcare. Positioned within Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) job demands-resources framework, this research addresses a significant

gap by examining how transformational leadership behaviours may be leveraged to address the unique occupational stressors inherent in veterinary healthcare and support improved employee mental wellbeing.

The study investigates whether transformational leadership can buffer the relationship between occupational stress and emotional exhaustion in veterinary professionals. Specific aims include evaluating the strength of this relationship and assessing transformational leadership's direct and indirect effects in alleviating these negative outcomes.

This cross-sectional study surveyed 134 UK veterinary surgeons and nurses registered with the RCVS. Participants completed validated scales measuring transformational leadership behaviours, perceived occupational stress, and emotional exhaustion. Statistical analyses, including correlations, regression, and structural equation modelling, were employed to explore relationships and assess mediating and moderating effects.

A strong positive association was found between occupational stress levels and emotional exhaustion, accounting for nearly half of the variation. Conversely, a negative relationship was identified between transformational leadership and emotional exhaustion. While transformational leadership did not directly reduce emotional exhaustion, it was associated with a lower level of occupational stress. Structural equation modelling confirmed a statistically significant indirect effect, suggesting that transformational leadership supports wellbeing indirectly by lowering perceived stress.

This study suggests the potential role of transformational leadership in supporting veterinary professionals' mental health through its association with lower levels of stress-induced exhaustion. Findings underscore the importance of integrating leadership development initiatives into broader mental health strategies in the veterinary sector, aligning with global efforts to address systemic stressors and enhance workplace resilience. Future research should examine transformational leadership's application across diverse veterinary contexts and explore additional job resources within the job demands-resources framework.

POSTER PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

What is the experience of neurodivergent veterinary students in clinical learning environments?

Dr Sabine Töttemeyer
Associate Professor,
University of Nottingham,
UK



Sabine is a teaching focused associate professor at the School of Veterinary Medicine and Science at the University of Nottingham with a masters in higher education and applied positive psychology and coaching psychology and a PGCert in neurodiversity workplace coaching. She is also Welfare Senior Tutor and Mental Health First Aider. She has expertise and research interests in numerous equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) areas including neurodiversity, mental health and wellbeing. Other interests include the student experience, coaching and mentoring.

Abstract

Neurodiversity refers to the natural variations in human neurological function, which can manifest in a wide range of conditions (Amstrong 2012). Students with neurodivergent (ND) conditions are impacted in day-to-day life and face considerable challenges navigating higher education, leading to frustration, low wellbeing, and contributing to mental health conditions such as depression (Clouder et al 2020). This study aimed to address the current lack of research into the experiences of neurodivergent vet students particularly in clinical learning environments (CLEs). Understanding their experiences will inform the provision of better support.

Research question: What is the experience of neurodivergent veterinary students in the CLE?

Neurodivergent veterinary students (years three to five) were invited to participate in an online survey and follow up semi-structured interviews investigating their experience of CLEs. Mixed-method analysis of responses was conducted of survey responses and reflexive thematic analysis of interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke 2021).

Survey responses were collected from 41 neurodivergent students identifying as autistic, dyslexic, ADHD and/or dyspraxic. Enablers of participation in CLEs included 'quiet areas', 'breaks', 'personal items', and 'supportive staff'. Barriers included 'overstimulation', 'lack of clear information', 'specific challenges/requirements', 'lack of breaks', 'unsupportive staff' and 'fear of stigma'. Participants emphasised the potential negative impact that feedback focusing on social interactions can have on neurodivergent students.

Nine semi-structured interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, identifying four overarching themes:

1. Individual neurodivergent identity;
2. Self-management strategies;
3. Barriers to self-advocacy and disclosure; and,
4. Impact on wellbeing and mental health.

ND veterinary students identified as having diverse needs, which varied in different CLE environments. Though most students reported self-management coping strategies, those were not always sufficient. Students experienced barriers to self-advocating or disclosing their neurodivergence. These barriers included external stigma and internal factors reducing self-efficacy. Decreased self-advocacy and disclosure in turn led to reduced student wellbeing and worsened mental health.

ND veterinary students often enjoy CLEs but rarely feel adequately supported or prepared to advocate for their needs. A psychologically safe environment through reasonable adjustments and neurodiversity aware staff in combination with support to develop self-advocacy would allow ND students to be at their best in the CLE.

Control of access to dangerous drugs: one step at a time...

Professor Stuart Reid FRCVS

President and Principal, Royal Veterinary College, UK

Stuart has led the RVC since 2011. He is also an RCVS past-president and, during his time on RCVS Council, he presided over the ratification and adoption of a new Royal Charter which recognised veterinary nurses as a fully regulated profession for the first time; launched a consultation on the proposed use of 'Dr' as a courtesy title for veterinary surgeons which was then approved by RCVS Council; and ran the London Marathon to raise money for animal welfare and mental health charities. He was also heavily involved in the work of MMI, including chairing its governing taskforce, as well as the joint RCVS and British Veterinary Association (BVA) Vet Futures project.



Abstract

Controlled drugs present significant safety, ethical, and legal challenges for veterinary professionals, especially for those working in rural environments. Research has highlighted links between access to means and veterinary suicide (Waitz-Kudla et al., 2023; Witte et al., 2019). Research has also identified a correlation between the availability of euthanasia drugs and increased suicide risk among veterinarians, due to

inadequate storage means (Nett et al., 2020).

Research into suicide prevention (Nordentoft, 2007) identifies strategies to prevent suicide, including restricting access to means. The project team applied these strategies to handling drugs used in euthanasia in the veterinary profession. Euthasafe was developed as a portable, app controlled, storage system which could act as a preventive measure, integrating with existing practice procedures in end-of-life veterinary care.

Prototype Euthasafe cases were distributed to seven UK veterinary practices, for an eight month trial. A total of 39 members of staff participated including nurses, veterinarians and dispensary staff. Participants completed pre and post-trial surveys assessing drug handling procedures and attitudes towards secure drug storage and transport. Data were recorded through the Euthasafe companion app involving back office logs, emails and support calls. Training was provided through prerecorded videos.

Quantitative and qualitative data were used to assess the product's operational integration, usability, impact on perceived security and technical performance. Post-trial survey responses highlighted increased willingness to use Euthasafe for drug transport, although support for in clinic use remained neutral. The companion app recorded 144 access attempts, with 20 users actively engaging. Feedback also emphasised concerns with device size, lock reliability, app usability and battery life. Robustness and security were received positively, but complexity in the access process affected user confidence.

The findings support ongoing development work through user-centred improvements to the Euthasafe system. Further work will be required to encourage adoption of the system in the veterinary community.

About the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative strategy

Since our launch, we have delivered work through three workstreams: prevent, protect and support, which each play a key role in helping us to communicate the scope and breadth of our activities. The workstreams also reflect our commitment to a multidimensional approach towards supporting veterinary professionals' mental health.

Prevent: Systemic and organisational approaches to mental health

Through our prevent workstream, we focus on developing our understanding of contributors to mental health in the professions, and respond to these new insights accordingly. Our new Applied Mental Health Science series and RCVS Academy courses not only equip individuals with the awareness, knowledge and skills they need to remain well at work, but upskill leaders and managers to be better able manage mental health in the workplace. Resources are designed to equip those in leadership positions to understand their legal responsibilities and implement strategies that drive positive workplace cultures.

Our new veterinary mental health research grant programme also sits within this workstream and aims to support researchers at all career stages to advance our understanding of veterinary mental health.

Protect: Increasing our reach

Through our protect stream, we deliver a varied programme of high quality and evidence-based CPD, resources, collaborations and events designed to equip the veterinary



professions with the tools and knowledge to stay well, even in challenging circumstances.

Support: Innovation and the evidence base

Through our support workstream, we combine our commitment to learning from the existing evidence base, with our drive to innovate and further our understanding of what the problems are, what helps mitigate them, and what barriers are preventing change. In this way, we continue to address some of the most complex and difficult issues around veterinary mental health. We also continue to be mindful of the impact our concerns investigation and disciplinary processes can have on veterinary mental health, and take steps towards continual improvement.

Spotlight

Mental Health Research Grants programme

Since 2019, we've awarded over **£155,000 in research grant funding to support mental health across the veterinary community**, with projects focused on farm vet wellbeing, stressors of autistic veterinary surgeons, moral injury, racism, compassion focused therapy, and SVN mental health in education under the Sarah Brown Grant.

In 2024, we launched our new grant programme, which aims to drive change that will positively impact mental health in the veterinary sector. The new programme offers two types of grants.

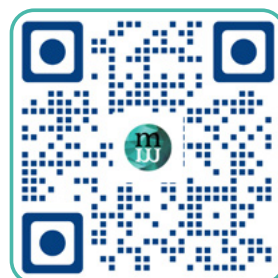
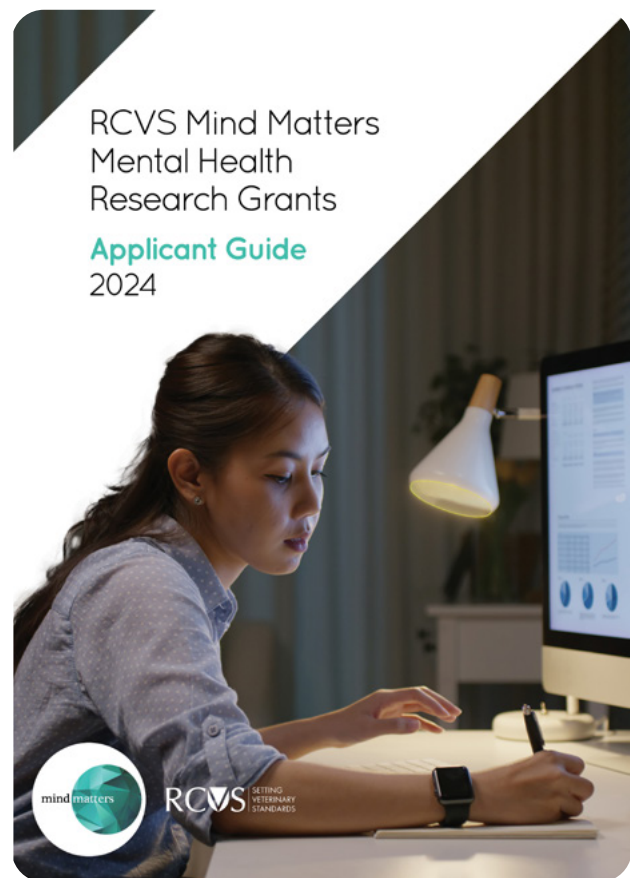
- **£5,000 Discovery Grant** - targeted towards postgraduate or early career researchers looking to kick-start small-scale studies
- **£15,000 Impact Grant** - aimed at more established researchers working on more substantial medium-size projects

Applications for both grants are open to researchers at all career stages.

Discovery and Impact Awards (2024 - Present)

- 2024 - Oxford Brookes University (£15,000 Impact Grant)
- 2025 – University of Manchester (£15,000 Impact Grant)
- 2025 – To be confirmed (£5,000 Discovery Grant)

Applications for round three of our new research grants programme will open in spring 2026. Please keep an eye on our website for updates and scan the QR code to find out more.



Spotlight

RCVS Academy courses

The **RCVS Academy is a free digital learning platform for veterinary professionals.** It aims to support registered vets and vet nurses to meet professional standards by providing relevant, up-to-date knowledge.

Hosting a range of topics, the Academy brings together expertise from across the College to offer high-quality, engaging and interactive learning.

Working alongside the Academy Team, we have produced three new mental health and wellbeing centric courses which are available to all registered vets and nurses and student veterinary nurses. These are:

- **Managing mental health in the workplace (new course)** - This course provides practical tools to foster a culture where mental health is supported, resilience is strengthened, and everyone can thrive - even in challenging times.
- **Suicide awareness fundamentals (new course)** - Learn about the factors that contribute to suicide, particularly within the veterinary field, and explore practical ways to help create a safer, more supportive workplace. The course covers how to talk about suicide responsibly, reduce stigma, recognise warning signs of suicidal ideation, and support those in crisis or those affected by suicide.
- **Civility fundamentals** – Explore the impact of incivility and develop knowledge and skills to recognise and respond as a witness or recipient. You will learn about key strategies to build and promote civility in your workplace.

For more information on the RCVS Academy, the courses listed above, and other available courses, log into the Academy using your RCVS MyAccount details at:


<https://academy.rcvs.org.uk/> or scan the QR code.

If you have any questions, email the Academy Team on academy@rcvs.org.uk



Spotlight

Reasonable adjustments campaign

 **Our ground-breaking survey with the British Veterinary Chronic Illness Society (BVCIS),** Disability and Chronic Illness in Veterinary Work and Education (2024), showed a pressing need to talk about disability, chronic illness, neurodivergence and mental health and the provision of support through reasonable adjustments in veterinary workplaces.

The 'Let's Talk Adjustments' campaign aimed to raise awareness and empower everyone in veterinary workplaces, regardless of role, disability or health condition, to have important conversations about reasonable adjustments. It ran from February to August 2025. Campaign resources, tools and guidance were delivered through a series of projects and activities shared via social media, newsletters and events. These included:

- Curated information on disability inclusion, reasonable adjustments and Equality Act guidance.
- Guidance for managers and employees on how to approach discussions about reasonable adjustments at work.
- A real stories and insights series co-created with veterinary professionals with different disabilities and chronic conditions who have received workplace adjustments.
- An introduction to occupational therapy in the workplace with guidance and practical tips on wellbeing for employees with disabilities and health conditions.
- Development of an adjustment passport template for use in the workplace.
- A webinar panel discussion event with academic experts and veterinary professionals with lived experience.

For more information on reasonable adjustments, and to explore the resources available please visit: www.rcvs.org.uk/letstalkadjustments or scan the QR code.



Let's Talk Adjustments:
A guide to discussing reasonable adjustments at work



RCVS | SETTING VETERINARY STANDARDS



Spotlight

Applied Mental Health Science series

This year, we launched our new **Applied Mental Health Science publication series**, which offers a collection of bitesize content developed in partnership with a range of experts to make high-quality, practical mental health information more accessible across the veterinary professions. The 'Let's talk' guides not only shine a spotlight on common mental health conditions, but provide individuals – including their colleagues, managers, and loved ones – with practical information such as how to support someone, how treatment works for the condition, how to make reasonable adjustments and where to signpost people on to.

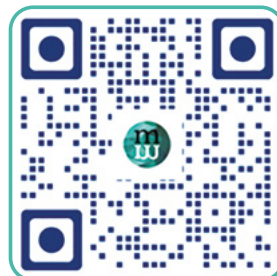
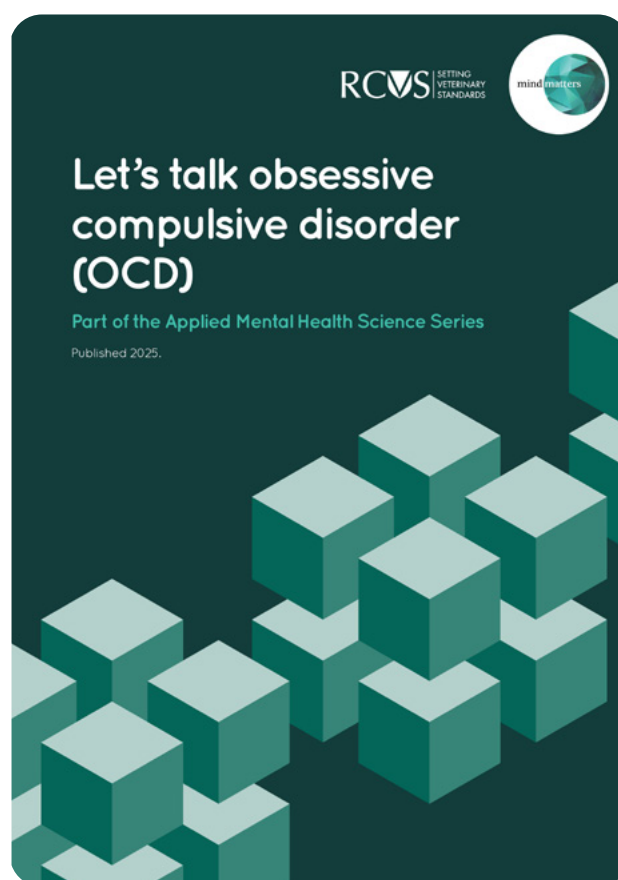
2025 saw the launch of our guides on depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), perinatal anxiety and depression, as well as our revised guide on understanding and managing stress in the veterinary workplace.

Further guides will be published in 2026.

Scan the QR code below to access the guides or visit:
<https://vetmindmatters.org/applied-mental-health-science-series/>

“I'm delighted to be working with the RCVS on the Applied Mental Health Science series, using robust scientific research to develop guidance that makes sense and is evidence based. Struggling with mental health can be overwhelming, and these guides provide simple, informed overviews of what you need to know and what to do next, in terms we can all understand. It is vital that we are able to provide information and advice on these important matters when they are most needed.”

Dr Jo Daniels, Clinical Psychologist



Spotlight

Our support to Vetlife and VetSupport

Support is a key pillar of the MMI strategy. While MMI does not in itself offer direct mental health support, it does provide funding for services that are set up to offer these provisions such as Vetlife, VetSupport, and ProfCon Investigation Support – a subsidiary of VetSupport.

Vetlife

Since 2015, the RCVS has provided over £1.1 million pounds in funding to Vetlife, through MMI, in support of its helpline, which runs 24/7, 365 days a year.

Vetlife Helpline is an independent, confidential and free listening service for vets, veterinary nurses, students and everyone in the veterinary community. Calls and emails are answered by trained volunteers who have experience of the professions.

VetSupport

VetSupport is a voluntary support network providing longer term coaching support to help individuals with managing overwhelm, anxiety or stress, forward planning, decision making, finding a healthy work-life balance, and providing further contacts for support and advice.

MMI provides funding to help train volunteers for the VetSupport service.

ProfCon Investigation Support

An independent service, launched by the RCVS and delivered by VetSupport, Profcon Investigation Support is a confidential listening and support service. It is delivered by a group of volunteers who have been trained to give emotional support to any veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse going through the RCVS Professional Conduct investigation process.

The support service is also open to those veterinary professionals who have had cause to raise a complaint against a fellow professional, or who have been asked to act as a witness in a case.



OUR EXHIBITORS

We're proud to welcome a diverse group of organisations this year, spanning mental health, agriculture, equine and animal welfare sectors. We thank them all for their time, contributions and support of our work.

Visit our exhibition area to learn more about their wonderful work.



HELP AND SUPPORT

As part of our commitment to the continuous improvement, we welcome your feedback on today's event and would be grateful if you could complete our short survey which will be sent to you in due course.

If you are a registered veterinary surgeon or veterinary nurse, don't forget to claim today's event as CPD and register it on the **RCVS 1CPD app**.

Help and support

Samaritans – available 24/7 and provides a safe place for anyone, whatever you are going through. Call **116 123** or email: jo@samaritans.org

Shout – available 24/7 and offers a free, confidential text messaging service for anyone who is struggling to cope. Text **SHOUT** to **85258**

If you need urgent help – call NHS **111** in England, Wales and Scotland, or Lifeline on **0808 808 8000** in Northern Ireland. You can also contact a GP surgery and ask for an emergency appointment.

If you are in crisis or need immediate medical help – call **999** and ask for an ambulance or visit your local A&E department.

Veterinary specific help and support

Vetlife helpline – available 24/7 to listen and offer a confidential, safe, and non-judgmental space. Call **0303 040 2551** or visit <https://helpline.vetlife.org.uk> to register and contact via email.

VetSupport – offers a confidential, empathetic, and non-judgmental listening ear across UK and Ireland. They also provide a confidential support service for those going through RCVS Professional Conduct Investigation process. Email info@vetsupport.me and they guarantee a reply within 24 hours.

RCVS Mind Matters Research Symposium 2025

10 | YEARS
ANNIVERSARY

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