

# COUNCILLORS DENY 'LACK OF ACTION' CLAIM

report by  
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VETERINARY associations are unwilling to address the real issues behind the high incidence of suicide in the profession, it has been claimed.

The accusation was voiced to *Veterinary Times* as part of a proposal for a UK veterinary union.

The proponent, veterinarian Shams Mir, believes the associations are ignoring the poor employment and working conditions that, he says, contribute to vets' depression. He claims pay, lack of proper employment contracts, long hours, client expectations and poor working environments all contribute to mental health issues among members of the profession.

Dr Mir suggested that the practice owners and partners who were members of veterinary associations' councils were unwilling to address employment issues. As a result, he has called for the creation of a veterinary union to "address the issues that threaten our very existence".

However, past and present council members of the BSAVA, SPVS and BVA have rejected the accusations and insist they remain committed to tackling all the issues behind the profession's high suicide rate.



Mike Jessop: union not needed.

While accepting that pay and working conditions were likely to have contributed to the situation, BSAVA president Mike Jessop insisted that the causes were likely to be far more wide ranging.

He emphasised: "Suicide is taken very seriously by the veterinary associations, and a number of studies and working parties continue to look at all the contributing issues."

## Despair

Mr Jessop also denied that a veterinary union was needed because of the work already done by existing organisations.

"A veterinary union would just sit somewhere in between SPVS and BVA," he said, and added: "There is certainly a lot of despair within the associations as to the terms, conditions, pay and working hours of the profession."

As a result, Mr Jessop has backed the BVA to continue its work and appealed to members of the profession to raise any issues with their regional BVA representatives. He explained: "The RCVS is the regulator and BSAVA is about CPD; therefore, the BVA is rightly the lead body on this, and leading well."

BVA president Nick Blayney agreed that the association must take a lead when addressing the high suicide rate, and insisted that it had already implemented initiatives towards that aim. He said: "In the past decade it has become apparent that depression has become a problem. In that time we have created a suite

of support mechanisms, which we will continue to develop."

Mr Blayney pointed to the Young Vet Network, the Lancaster student weekend and the most recent BVA congress – which included a lecture by psychiatrist Raj Persaud – as examples of the BVA's efforts.

He continued: "There are lots of reasons for stresses in veterinary employment, and certainly pay, client expectations etc are among them. But it is unfair to suggest that the organisations are 'partners' clubs' and, therefore, not addressing the issues. I think there is a huge amount of evidence to the contrary."

However, Dr Mir believes there is still an unwillingness to address employment issues. He said: "Nobody would talk about such issues. Even the RCVS did not dare to include salaries and working conditions in its so-called *Survey of the Profession*."

In response, an RCVS spokesman explained: "We did not include salary questions in our *Survey of the Profession 2006* as these issues are covered in the annual SPVS salary survey. The college is, of course, concerned about issues relating to stress in the profession, but it is not within our remit to look at pay and conditions."

"If a veterinary surgeon, as an employer, acted in a manner that could be described as disgraceful in a professional respect, this would be a matter for the college to investigate. The BVA is essentially the 'union' for veterinary surgeons – it is certainly there to represent the profession and we would encourage practitioners to join the association to ensure their voices are heard."

## Siberian ce proves to toothless



AN eight-year-old Siberian tiger has managed to smile after vets gave it a new gold tooth.

A team of 15 was needed to treat the animal, which had to have its teeth filled and monitored the 250kg tiger. The operation was performed by a team of vets at Utyos R, near Kutuzovka village, in Siberia – where the animal was about to be operated on due to its refusal to eat after the big cat refused food for three days.

It was not the first dental work to be done on the tiger, Lyuti (meaning ferocious). In 2000, the animal had palladium alloy canines implanted after it was injured and its jaw was broken while it was being kept by poachers who had killed its mother.

In its eight years at the rescue centre, Lyuti has become a local celebrity and anxious visitors crowd the centre to hear news of the dental operation.

The David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation has provided sponsorship of Lyuti, with all the money from the sale of its



After surgery (top) involving a team of 15 vets, Lyuti recovers with a new gold tooth (above).