

# Call to vets: speak up before its too late

Dear editor,

In response to my letter calling for the creation of a union to address the core issues faced by vets (June 2 issue), the BSAVA has come closer to reality by finally accepting that pay and working conditions are likely to have contributed to the situation of the high suicide rate among vets ("Councillors deny 'lack of action' claim", June 2 issue).

The suggestion, in the same article, that there is a "lot of despair within the associations as to the terms, conditions, pay and working hours of the profession" is symbolic of their unwillingness to act and serves no purpose to the veterinarians whose lives continue to be blighted by such problems.

It is surprising that instead of coming clean on the matter like BSAVA, the BVA is still trying to hide behind the smoke of a decade-old problem of depression. I thought that the "lecture by psychiatrist Raj Persaud", cited in the article as an "example of BVA's efforts" to address the problem, would have, at least, helped the association to understand that depression is a symptom, and not the cause of the problem. To retain any credibility for whatever it may be doing in the name of the profession, it is important that the BVA admits that it has failed the vast majority of vets in this country.

What is not surprising is that, while washing their hands of any responsibility, the privileged councillors in BSAVA and the RCVS try to protect their comrades in the BVA and project the association as the "lead body on this, and leading well". What BVA has so far done to address the causes of the decade-old problem is anyone's guess.

On a similar note, it is incredible for the RCVS to leave the salary question off its survey for SPVS, which is, in my view, an elite club of veterinary employers. Its survey on salaries of assistants – produced, it states, to provide a "starting point in salary negotiations" between "practice and employee" – is based on statistically insignificant figures, skewed statistics and astronomical classifications designed to provide a tool to its members to settle minimalist salaries for assistants. Allowing this piece of cake to SPVS is not inadvertent; it is also a slap in the face of thousands of vets who pay their membership fees to the RCVS.

I believe BVA is inherently incapable of dealing with the problems faced by vets. The BVA sets itself no clear mandate to address issues like terms, conditions, pay and working hours of the profession. It only feels a "lot of despair" about such issues.

Since the publication of my above referred letter, I have received a stream of emails and letters supporting the idea of a veterinary union – many containing harrowing tales of long suffering. I didn't receive a single response, either from the 11,000 members of BVA or the thousands of vets who are not members, refuting the idea of a union.

For some time, I have enquired how other people view their lives as vets. In many instances, I have perceived a sense of profound numbness, indicative of persistent silent suffering and deep despair. This situation cannot be allowed to continue. Vets need to speak up and unite to alleviate their suffering and safeguard their futures.

Yours faithfully,

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