

BVA can do all you ask and more, Dr Mir

Dear editor,

I am responding to the recent letters by Shams Mir (June 2 and July 14 issues) in the hope I can put his mind to rest on a few points.

I am a recent graduate representative at the BVA, who, by the logic of demographics, can safely assume that the majority of vets I represent (all BVA members who have been qualified from zero to eight years) through the Young Vet Network (YVN) are veterinary assistants in general practice.

The concerns that Dr Mir raises about the highly variable state of veterinary employment in this country are very familiar to me and members of the YVN. I applaud his bold efforts to bring them to wider attention and commend his candour.

However, there are some points I wish to make and I hope they add some balance to the debate. Firstly, I would like to flag up what BVA has done to "address the causes of the decade-old problem". It established the YVN, which was launched 14 months ago, to create a forum of support and information for young practitioners. YVN members enjoy many benefits, including free CPD, but for those experiencing employment problems, each member:

- Receives a copy of the BVA new graduate guide, which has advice on finding the right job, employer and getting a contract in place.
- Has access to an internet-based discussion forum, where members can discuss their employment problems (anonymously if they wish) for direct advice from contemporaries who will have gone through similar troubles.
- Has representation on BVA council (through myself and a colleague), to bring these issues to attention of the BVA and defend YVN members' interests in the wider issues. I also invite members to contact me directly with any problems or issues they wish to raise.

In the year since it has been launched, depression, pay and conditions and (most recently) employment contracts, and their apparent dearth in veterinary employment, have been discussed on the forum. So I would disagree with Dr Mir that "nobody would talk about such issues", because we do.

Further to the YVN, the BVA also launched the graduate support scheme meetings in March last year. These meetings are hosted by the BVA's regional divisions and are run by trained veterinary facilitators. The main aim of the meetings is to support new graduates, and to provide a forum where they can share their experiences and voice concerns. The meetings are open to both members of the BVA and the divisions and non-members – surely, further proof of BVA's commitment to supporting the profession?

Regarding the help available to other members, the BVA has a legal helpline, which members can use free of charge for any personal or professional legal matter, and provides a standard contract of employment on its website for members to download. I also feel that I need to point out that while Dr Mir stated that "it is nice to see funds and websites being developed to help vets on the slippery slope", he neglected to name them. So I will provide them here: the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (www.vbf.org.uk), which incorporates the Vet Helpline (07659 81118) and www.vetlife.org.uk

Our profession is very small, very dispersed and the majority of its members work in small business. We are not in the position to stage marches on Downing Street or form picket lines. It is also important to acknowledge the majority of practising veterinary assistants who are content with their employment, and make sure they are not excluded from the debate.

I hope Dr Mir is persuaded that the representational body he seeks already exists, and understands it is up to the individual veterinary surgeon to make the most of it.

In my view, BVA membership is the means to turn what are otherwise tragic individual anecdotes into issues that can be brought to the attention of the wider profession.

Yours faithfully,

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