

Success built on backs of 'underpaid' graduates

Dear editor,

Is it really time to congratulate the veterinary profession on running financially successful businesses, as suggested by Neil Stoddard (July 14 issue)? Well, after the published survey (*The Times*, June 16 issue) we know for sure that a small proportion of the profession indeed has lots of reason to celebrate. However, increasing financial success of practices has rarely been matched by similar positive trends in staff management. A study into the proportion of the total increase in financial gains that has been passed on to staff, both by inflating salaries and by creating better working conditions, would produce very interesting results. For employed staff, these "efficient" businesses have only become ever-more stressful environments to work in. Many assistants now work to financial targets and are assessed by bosses looking over their shoulders. In the UK, I think a shocking amount of the gains have been achieved on the backs of undertrained, underpaid new graduates who are worked into the ground without mercy, only to be replaced by fresh new graduates when their batteries run out. In my view, the nature of the work we do actually makes it hard to run veterinary practices very efficiently. Still, these businesses manage to make more money than others by ignoring legislation on working hours and health and safety, and somehow getting away with it (letter from name and address supplied, April 28 issue).

Mr Stoddard brings up the fact that the only other list we have managed to dominate is that of suicide rates. This is very striking indeed. Could it be more than a coincidence, as suggested by Shams Mir (June 2 and July 14 issues)?

Personally, I have been very lucky to be employed by supportive practices. However, I have heard and seen enough horror stories to know that these practices form a minority. How many owners of the "efficient" businesses Mr Stoddard describes can honestly look into the mirror and say they have done well? I sincerely hope there are actually far more than I think there are.

Yours faithfully,

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