

Who's watching broader attitude of profession?

Dear editor,

Regarding letters by Shams Mir (June 2 and July 14 issues) and others on the topic of discontentment among vets, I would like to add my own observations. I write from the perspective of a graduate with 10 years' experience. I work in an average small animal practice and my career has taken an average practitioner's course. I have seen most of my university contemporaries leave work for other careers.

I guess at the heart of this debate is a question: are these correspondents ungrateful, unhappy aggravators with a perverted view of the profession and its bodies, or do they actually have a point? And if so, what exactly is it? Furthermore, do they speak for a larger, silent body of opinion?

My experience of veterinary practice has been mixed. I have enjoyed many highs. I have, like many vets, also had lows. Raj Persaud, no less, has attempted to rationalise why vets are prone to such lows. He mentioned our goal-orientated approach to work and the almost intimate relationship we have with death. So far, so depressing. The risk with psychoanalysing the practitioner in isolation is that a frank debate on the profession as a whole is, conveniently, unheard.

I believe that the fluid relationship you have with your work environment is significantly influenced by the current climate within your profession. And what is the climate in the veterinary profession?

The maturation of a business sentiment has undoubtedly had some positive effects. It has enabled private enterprises to remain profitable and – no doubt, owners would argue – this has resulted in reinvestment in the form of equipment and higher staffing levels.

From my perspective, however, it has only led to greater cynicism among employers. So, what's wrong with a more cut-throat attitude to what is a private sector industry, I hear you say? What's wrong with a bit of Alan Sugar in the prep room?

While the ratcheting up of fees allows for greater profitability, it also ratchets up disillusionment if intentions are not rationalised coherently to members of the practice team. If higher charges aren't followed by reinvestment in facilities, or – dare I say it – higher salaries, does it come as any surprise we are in the middle of a terribly British spat?

Personally, working with dangerously outdated equipment while you watch your employer waft into the car park in air-conditioned contentment does induce uncharitable feelings. Whether you describe this emotion as unfair, or perfectly justified, is up to you, but it may go some way to explaining why so many vets are pissed off.

If I may be so bold, we are all members of a profession. It demands the highest levels of probity. But while so much of the RCVS' time is spent examining the conduct of individuals, who is watching the broader attitude of the profession and those with enormous influence – business owners? Perchance, could it be because our governing bodies are largely composed of business owners?

NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED.

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