

We're paying price for working time abuse

Dear editor,

Your front-page story "Practices back EU plans to simplify on-call rules" (August 4 issue) makes alarming reading.

The BVA president, quite incredibly, acknowledges that "there is no doubt that a lot of practices are ignoring the Working Time Regulations (WTR)" – a blatant violation of employment laws. The president appears to proudly condone this illegal practice by suggesting that it is "a reflection of the standards that the profession is prepared to set", which, I feel, is quite outrageous.

I do not think that the majority of the hard-working vets across the country, who pay the price for the standards maintained through illegal practices, would consider themselves part of the profession the "businessmen's veterinary association" (BVA) appears to represent.

With the backdrop of ongoing rampant abuse of working time regulations in veterinary practices, it is no wonder that, with the prospect of these regulations being relaxed, the SPVS and BVA presidents are jumping for joy, with a degree of delirium as reflected in their statements in the article under discussion. The excitement is heightened further by the prospect of the recently initiated RCVS consultations to review the college's guidance on 24-hour emergency cover potentially leading to relaxations on the requirements.

With regard to this consultation, the letter issued to members of the RCVS by newly appointed president Jill Nute reads: "My first letter as president comes to you about an important consultation exercise. It's on an issue that affects every veterinary surgeon in clinical practice in the UK." Mrs Nute's letter goes on to say that: "We tend to hear from those with very strong views, but we need a representative evidence base on which to make decisions about such an important matter."

All this sounds refreshingly democratic. The acid test, in my opinion, will be in whether the different sections of the veterinary profession in clinical practice – including assistants, who constitute the majority of the vets – will be consulted proportionately, and right from the beginning of this exercise.

In a working culture permissive of abuse, it is not surprising that the working time regulations continue to be massively abused in veterinary practices without anyone raising a finger. Now that the noose of regulations is likely to loosen, it is not difficult to imagine what will, probably, follow.

If we want to stop paying the price for abuse in our practices and improve our record of depression and suicides, there has to be an organisation that can keep a close eye on the profession.

Yours faithfully,

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