

Vet's delight at support for union idea

FOLLOWING the lively debate about the profession's welfare that he provoked in *Veterinary Times*, a Lancashire clinician is continuing to push his case for a union for veterinary surgeons.

Shams Mir is concerned about stressful working conditions, lack of support for practitioners and the profession's high suicide rate. In a letter published in *Veterinary Times* in June, he said: "Vets have the highest rate of suicide of any profession in Britain. I think the root cause of the problem is the poor employment and working conditions of vets.

"Vets are vastly underpaid. There is no standard salary structure and no arrangement or guarantee for increments, leading to stagnation and frustration in the wake of unabated demands on high performance and efficiency."

Dr Mir also claimed the BSAVA and BVA did not function to support the grassroots of the profession and that a new organisation was needed.

Veterinary Times received letters about the issues raised by Dr Mir – both for and against his idea.

But Dr Mir said he had also received hundreds of emails from vets concerned about the level of support available to members of the profession.

He said: "All responses received thus far have unequivocally agreed with what I said in my letter. Many responses are from vets owning practices – one such respondent stated 'I think (even as an owner of three surgeries) it was accurate for a large

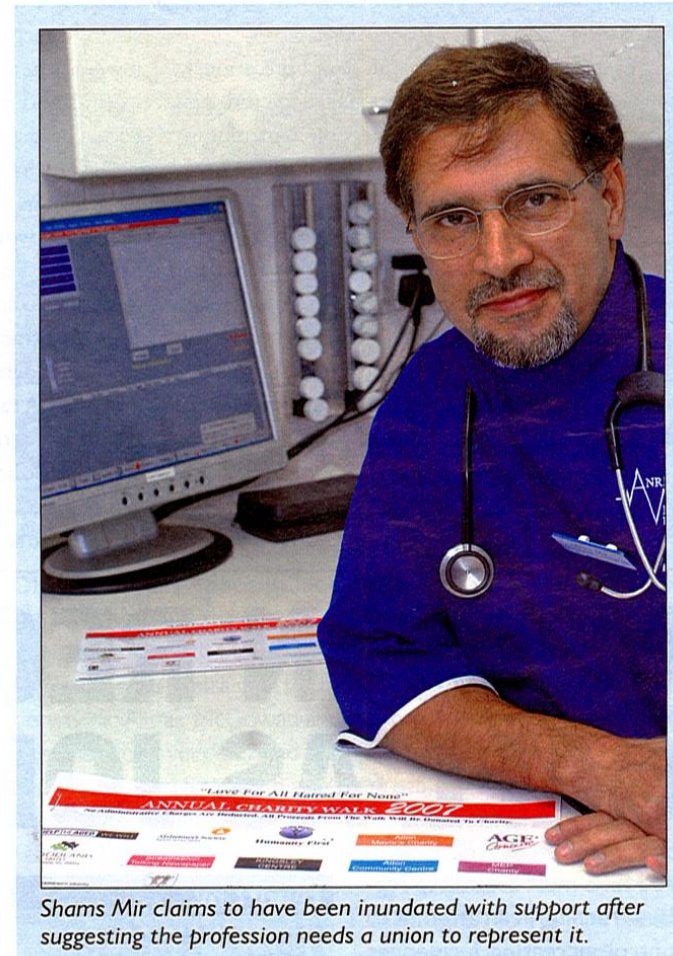
percentage of the working vet population'." Dr Mir also said that correspondents agreed that existing veterinary bodies did not represent their concerns and that a new organisation concerned with veterinary welfare would be welcomed.

The response of readers has encouraged Dr Mir to continue to campaign for a new union. He said: "Considering the strength of the feelings expressed in response, I'm sure vets are ready to leave their fears behind and come forward to help. It has strengthened my feeling that this is a just cause for which we should all work together."

Commenting on the debate and the idea of a union, BVA president Nick Blayney said: "There are young vets who find this job stressful, but by and large they are a capable, articulate bunch. You've got to go out and take the world by the balls.

"A union is not a new idea. As a young assistant, I probably felt there was a need to have different organisations representing junior members of the profession and practice owners. As I got older, I saw the profession was too small to have disparate groups," he added.

And Mr Blayney said: "The profession is curious as it is made up of small businesses that have to stand alone in a harsh commercial climate. We have to represent the profession – both employer and employee – and if we tried to separate the two there would be no professional voice at all."



Shams Mir claims to have been inundated with support after suggesting the profession needs a union to represent it.