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COMING UP

THE annual BSAVA congress takes place from 2nd to 5th April in Birmingham's ICC and NIA

The welcome address will be given by the president, Professor Ed Hall, and the annual awards presented at 12.30pm on Thursday. Later that day (4.15) the BSAVA lecture will be given by Dr Phil Hammond.

In addition to the many streams of scientific and clinical lectures and masterclasses, etc., there will be two general sessions: on Friday at 2pm David Bartram will present a report on mental health and well-being in the profession; and at 10am on Saturday there will be a joint RCVS-VMD session entitled *An Inspector calls* – this is a ticket only session (tickets obtainable from the RCVS) to discuss both the practice standards scheme and the VMD medicine-related inspections.

The exhibition in the NIA – described by the BSAVA as the largest companion animal exhibition in the world – runs from Thursday to Sunday morning.

At the AGM at 10.45 on Sunday Professor Hall will hand the presidential chain to Dr Richard Dixon.

Details are on www.bsava.com.

■ A new event, The London Veterinary Show, is to be held at Olympia in London on 6th and 7th November. This is an exhibition with CPD sessions arranged by the RVC. For details see www.londonvetshow.co.uk.

SUPPORT GROWING FOR FORMATION OF UNION

“MY boss doesn't believe that employment laws apply to him!”

This was one of many responses received following Mike Nelson's column in the last issue regarding calls for a veterinary union to be set up.

A number of correspondents, fearful for their jobs, asked to remain anonymous. One said she had been dismissed twice from practices for things she hadn't done. She knew of quite a number of young graduates who had already left the profession because of the way they had been treated.

It is clear that there is considerable unrest among assistant veterinary surgeons, not all of them young or recent graduates, over various employment issues, ranging from harassment and bullying to lack of respect and inadequate pay.

Discrimination

One complaint from some female assistants is that they are being paid less than male colleagues for equivalent jobs. Quite a number do not have contracts of employment, despite this being a legal

requirement, but generally feel powerless to do anything about it.

Several readers scoffed at the notion that the BVA would, or could, help them. “We need a body free from influence from employers,” was the main feeling expressed.

One reader said that the BVA was trying to do more for younger graduates than ever before but was not getting to grips

with employment issues. He said he recalled that BVA staff were reported to have joined a trade union some years ago when they felt they were being treated unfairly. “It's time for us to do the same, we need to get organised,” he added.

“Don't forget us nurses,” another reader wrote. “Some of us get less than the minimum wage [currently £5.73 per hour for people over 22; £4.77 for those aged 18-21] and when one of my friends in another practice who gets less than

that complained to her boss she was told it was all he could afford and she was welcome to look for a job somewhere else.”

Another said that the BVNA should be the union for nurses “but they don't want to rock the boat”.

Veterinary Practice can't claim that the responses are representative of the profession as a whole but there is certainly a problem that needs addressing.

This issue includes a response from Dr Shams Mir (page 4) who has been calling for a new body to be set up and support appears to be growing. It could well attract several hundred assistants, maybe more. Whether that body would include a section for nurses or other practice staff has not been made clear.

■ *Veterinary Practice* welcomes further comments from readers, especially those without a contract of employment or who feel they have been treated unfairly, or are for or against a new union being set up. Confidence will be respected. Please send comments to editor@veterinary-practice.com.

VETERINARY Practice

is inundated with responses to the call for a new body to represent veterinary staff

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