

# Can the BVA help solve *your* problem?

IT appears that my January column had the desired effect and stimulated debate. Furthermore, it looks as if that will continue for a little while yet.

The sad thing is that the problems are not only with young veterinary employees. One e-mail to the editor commented that he "would be interested to read an historical overview of major changes within BVA in a forthcoming Nelson's column".

He then asked "whether the VBF truly sorted out the root problems faced by young vets, or is it merely there to offer support to those who have already been on the receiving end of badly managed practices?"

Responding to his first comment, I investigated what the BVA offers to solve problems nowadays. It so happens that once I did so, it looked as if we might find the answer to his question; but more of that anon.

## The historical part

On 24th November 2004 there was an extraordinary general meeting of the Veterinary Benevolent Fund (VBF) at which the merger with the Veterinary Surgeon's Health Support Programme (VSHSP) and Vet Helpline was ratified. That was my starting point for the historical overview. What changes have there been in the last 18 months or so?

Having retired in 1996, I had no reason to look at the

VBF part of the BVA website, having no need for financial assistance, but when I looked this week I was amazed at the comprehensive improvements.

Although one can access it from the BVA website, you can go direct to [www.vetlife.org.uk](http://www.vetlife.org.uk) (VBF funded project) to find the wealth of useful information for both employees and employers in veterinary practices.



**MIKE NELSON**  
investigates what the association offers to veterinary surgeons with problems

## Changes for the better

The VetLife website is divided into several sections, namely:

- Legal & RCVS Complaints
- Employment Issues
- Relationships
- Stress, Depression and Suicide
- Addictive & Eating Disorders
- Isolation & Loneliness
- Financial Problems
- Support for Recent Graduates
- Veterinary Support Organisations

Click on Employment Issues and its first page summarises the content of this section. It points out that while a solicitor should be able to direct you to advice that will be charged for, the links in this section point towards some sources of information that are either available free or as part of a membership package.

It offers the opportunity to speak to someone with personal experience of the profession about the employment issues that are troubling you. It goes into how either Vet HelpLine or VSHSP (or both) can be contacted with their phone numbers, both at local call rates. All right, that is not exactly "new" but what followed it is.

## Guide for recent graduates

You can download a 16-page pdf file "The Early Years" (by Bob Moore) that is a guide for recent graduates to their early years in veterinary practice. Employers should ensure it is regarded as essential reading in their practice.

There is a link to the Government's own portal, DirectGov, with extensive advice on employment rights at [www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/index.htm](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/employment/index.htm), which is a must.

The BVA Legal Advice Line provides free legal advice (for BVA members only) 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, manned by a team of legal advisers covering all aspects of the law.

The BVA/Veterinary Association of Arbitration and Jurisprudence Mediation Service provides mediation but at a cost that is arranged directly between the mediator and the caller.

BVNA members have their own Industrial Relations Service Helpline.

Look at the website and all the relevant sections listed above.

## Employment issues sub-sections

Employment issues is divided into several sections which *inter alia* include:

- Employed vets
- Contractual matters
- Discrimination
- Bullying in the workplace

Those are the main areas relevant to the proposed Veterinary Union. It is not proposed to look at those

individually in this column but any reader who wants to know more detail knows now where to look.

## Answer to question in paragraph three

The current website is so comprehensive compared to the old and seems to cover everything. Yes, the VBF does offer significant

support "to employees in badly managed practices" but it is the BVA that is trying hard to get practices to meet their legal obligations.

Andrew Parker, chairman of the BVA Members Services Group (MSG), told me that the BVA is concerned and it is trying to initiate even more steps to eliminate what has clearly become a problem in too many practices. The MSG is planning to highlight to practices the importance of contracts of employment for every employee. Furthermore it advocates that practices operate annual employee appraisals.

After all, a practice with a rapid turnover of assistants is not as profitable as one that has fewer changes in personnel. Good management is repaid by an enhanced profit from a slower assistant turnover rate.

It is worth remembering that it is the BVA members' money that has paid for the Young Vets Network, as well as these moves to put the profession's house in order. Neither should we forget that some of the beneficiaries of those efforts are not members of the BVA.

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## Smartening up noticeboards

ROWES Veterinary Practice, which has four branches in South Gloucestershire, has installed a "SmartWall" from Gillot Imaging Business as a tool to inform and advise clients.

This style of noticeboard, says Gillot Imaging Business, "transforms windows, walls or display areas into exciting galleries using any mix of images and messages, providing consistently high presentation and allowing users to simply and rapidly update as and when they require."

SmartWall and sister product SmartWindow can fit most spaces and are based on panels which act as permanent backboards for SmartTiles, which are located using a peg or magnet system.

Each tile can be overprinted with images or messages, which are provided either by the client or by Gillot Imaging Business. Clients can send individual tiles or whole sections in to be reprinted and replaced.

Rowes, which celebrates its 60th year in 2008 and employs 22 veterinary surgeons, trialled the SmartWall at an open day at its Bradley Stoke branch. "SmartWall is similar to a jigsaw made up of a number of pieces and so allows different messages to be relayed at different times. We have positioned ours near the very entrance of the veterinary hospital where clients like to see it and pay attention to new messages and photos," says the practice's Sue McCuaig.

"The system is attractive and a perfect advertising tool and lends itself very well to the needs of veterinary practices.

The design process was fantastic: we were e-mailed ideas and could then add in our own suggestions on pictures and appropriate messages."

An average "wall" costs £150 to change completely and is usually delivered within 48 hours. Tiles can be changed from £6 each.

For more details, contact Gillot Imaging Business on 01628 530993.

■ Gary Gillot (left) shows Richard Rowe how individual tiles, photos and messages can be replaced.

