

VNS' COOL RESPONSE TO VETERINARY UNION IDEA

VNs have given a cool response to the possibility of joining a veterinary union, which a vet has been lobbying his profession to establish.

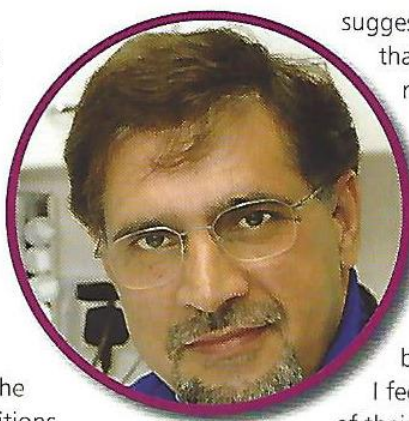
Wigan-based vet Shams Mir (pictured) has been promoting the idea of a union for vets since last June. He told *VN Times* that he recognised the difficult conditions VNs worked in, and said vets had told him that they would be happy to include VNs in a veterinary union – if one was established.

He said: "There is no doubt that VNs are also facing a variety of problems with regard to their working conditions and terms of employment, and have no proper means of reproach to solve such problems. I think the BVNA is on a par with the BVA in failing to address the problems faced by VNs.

"Most vets I have spoken to are, in principle, in favour of incorporating nurses in the proposed veterinary union. However, at this stage it may be more pragmatic to concentrate on involving a greater number of vets in the process of consultation. Once the process is concluded, and the union set up, it will be much easier to discuss the modalities and incorporate VNs in the main union, or create a satellite union for them."

Manchester-based VN Caro Laithwaite's experiences with unions in different industries has made her sceptical. She explained: "Many years ago, I was a kennel maid with racing greyhounds. Money was awful, and so the lads decided to look for a union to help us. They went to every union, but only one would consider us if they could guarantee a minimum of 15,000 people. Needless to say, nothing came of it, as I doubt there was half that many kennel hands in the UK. I thought unions were meant to help those in need, but I quickly learned they do not. It is their own pockets they help."

Lincolnshire-based VN Sal Holesworth



suggested that legislation, rather than unionisation, may be needed to support VNs. She said: "I have read letters written by Shams Mir in the veterinary press, and although I agree with a lot that he says, as a former union member I don't really see a union as being the answer. In the past, I feel unions improved the lot of their members, but the glory

days of the unions are long past. The idea of a veterinary union is interesting, but my personal thoughts are it wouldn't be that effective. I don't see how VNs joining a union for veterinary surgeons would work, as I see a huge conflict of interests. I appreciate the thought behind it, though, and wonder if there is another way ahead. Maybe legislation could be improved and this may have a knock-on effect on conditions within this industry."

BVNA president Bonny Millar said: "The BVNA, as the only representative body for veterinary nurses in the UK, fulfils many of the conventional responsibilities of a trade union, including representation, as well as advice on employment issues. The concept of a veterinary union is an interesting one; however, the BVNA would need to consider the implications before supporting such a proposal. There is no doubt that there is strength in numbers and, from that perspective, union representation might be advantageous for many veterinary nurses who tend to work in varying degrees of isolation."

She added: "Unions are generally considered to be important in enabling employees to fight for reasonable working conditions; however, their traditional, if somewhat outmoded, image of militant action is often unpopular with employers and, as such, there may be a tendency to create a rift between employer and employee."

If you would like more information from Dr Mir about his proposal for a veterinary union, you can email him at vets4bvu@hotmail.co.uk