

## Isn't it time we consider welfare of UK's vets?

Dear editor,

Following an increase in letters about working conditions in veterinary practice, the increase in discussion about the topic of suicide in the veterinary profession, the current focus of discussion on out-of-hours provision (with particular reference to Bradley Viner's article, March 3 issue, and Harry Waddle's front page March 24 issue) and the growing demands and expectations of the public on our service, is it not high time the welfare of vets was given as much consideration as the animals under our care?

In light of the mounting debts of veterinary graduates, salaries below those of other comparable professions and preposterously long working hours, we as a profession need to acknowledge there is a problem and take appropriate action. For far too long, practising members have worked ridiculous hours and, as such, any practising vets who are brave enough to work out their hourly rate of pay will no doubt find that they would earn more money stacking shelves than doing the high-pressure, technically demanding job that cost them at least five years of study and countless thousands of pounds in debt.

In the world of health and safety that we live in, should we not be listening to surveys that tell us that one in five road traffic accidents are caused by tired drivers and that you are three times more likely to have an accident on rural roads (where, by virtue of them being farm calls, is where mixed and large animal vets spend most of their days)? To say that we should be able to waive the right to the idea of a 48-hour working week, a daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours in each 24-hour period and 24 hours of consecutive rest every week, is no different to ignoring radiation safety or the laws of the highways on the way to a call, or other such measures specifically put in place to ensure our day-to-day safety at work. Does one of our profession have to be involved in a tragic accident caused by waiving such rights before we all agree the present situation is unacceptable?

It is only a matter of time before these conditions are imposed on our profession by law, whether we like it or not. Given that we are perceived as a well-respected, self-regulating profession, should we not be proving we are capable of such self-regulation by implementing safe and fair working conditions for our members?

This letter voices the opinion of a number of people in both small animal and mixed practice who, at the same time as very much enjoying their daily duties as practising veterinarians, do not feel that the job should carry such a huge financial and personal cost. The idea of this letter is to open discussion within the profession that will hopefully lead to safer, more socially acceptable working conditions, in line with the majority of the employed workforce in the country.

There is, no doubt, going to be a financial cost attached to these changes and, yes, ultimately this will have to be passed on to the public we provide a service to. The improved quality of service that a well-rested, more motivated and, possibly, less suicidal profession could provide would undoubtedly be recognised by the paying public.

Those in mixed and farm practices may argue that the farming industry could not afford these increased costs. Would our professional time not be better spent in discussion with the farming industry and the Government to look at how they can make up the difference in costs to ensure continued animal welfare, rather than how we can by just subsidising our own fees by undervaluing that same professional time and risking our personal safety in doing so?

To assess the opinion of the profession, a discussion topic has been added to the *Veterinary Times* forum. Veterinary employers, veterinary employees and veterinary students can voice their opinion on this contentious subject. We would encourage as many people as possible to get in touch. Visit [www.vbd.co.uk/forum/](http://www.vbd.co.uk/forum/) and make your

views known. You can request anonymity for any information you submit. A letter or article will summarise the findings in a subsequent issue of *Veterinary Times* and we look forward to it paving the way to a better future for all practising vets.

Yours faithfully,

NAMES AND ADDRESSES SUPPLIED.