

Union would have helped during my experiences

Dear editor,

I believe the veterinary market is becoming flooded with vets coming to the UK (as I did seven years ago), both specialists and first opinion practitioners. I feel that the availability of vets on the market is increasing (and I am careful to mention that quality does not always follow). As a response, the "power" of employers on employment can allow them to use it to their personal gain and at the expense of employees. It feels to me that most people averse to the idea of a veterinary union are practice owners (or veterinary surgeons that have never had to see the "unfair").

Events in my own life have led me to this conclusion. I started a new job at one practice under the impression that my clinical experience was very valuable and that the general working life within that practice was very relaxed and easy going. However, a few weeks into the job, I found that "relaxed" was from another dictionary: the expected 15-minute consults turned into seven-and-a-half minutes due to the unplanned booking of boosters, postoperative discharge and emergency consults getting booked between other consults, which were already fully booked. Due to my exceptionally high turnover (heavy surgical load), I requested to have a lightened consult load, which was declined. Instead, I was asked to relieve some of the load to the nurses. Unfortunately, 70 per cent of these were completely oblivious to the work that was expected from them and I was not even given a chance to provide them with the training I believed would be minimal to perform the extra tasks, despite the fact that these staff members were already, in my view, overworked.

In short, because of very obvious diverging opinions in the way I should manage my working time, I was asked to move on and give notice when appropriate. At that point, I had not signed my contract, as a three-month notice period seemed too long when I was already upset at work after only five weeks. I gave three weeks' notice which was not welcomed due to short notice – I felt I should not work for a place that did not want me there. My concerns continued when a bad reference was given of me to my next prospective employer, which led me to be discarded for a position that I was initially told to be the ideal candidate for.

The second example relates to a subsequent locum position as a part-time referral surgeon. After multiple meetings tuning the position to a mutual agreement, I accepted the position four months later. However, in the meantime, the management carried on looking for a possible replacement, should I not be taking the position, and employed someone. Due to the recession, I was told that my temporary contract was not to be renewed, despite having been offered a full-time position in writing two-and-a-half months earlier. The "replacement" practitioner who was found would be taking over the position. The reason given for this dismissal was financial difficulties, which left me rather bitter given that all the partners had bought shiny new cars only months before.

To summarise, I believe that a veterinary union would have certainly dissuaded some employers from looking for and employing unnecessary staff and later making those redundant shortly after (as in the second case). In the first case, I think that the strong backup of a union would hit hard on employers giving poor references, with or without reason, as giving no reference still speaks for itself.

I strongly believe that a union would prevent abuses of the employment market and support victims of such abuse. Furthermore, the funding of the union fee by a practice would be an additional proof of a practice's quality alongside (or against) the RCVS accreditation.

Yours faithfully,

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