

# Use of OOH providers should be mandatory

Dear editor,

I have read, with interest, Shams Mir's articles about unions and intend to reply to all the articles in full later.

However, much is made of work/life balance in these and other writings, and I can wholeheartedly agree with much of what has been said about quality of life. We are our own worst enemies.

I come from a medical background knowing only that my father worked 24/7/365. This was "normal" to me. When I entered the veterinary profession, where the ethos was the same, I knew no different. For 25 years I worked like a slave to clients who often did not appreciate I was there for them, and often to the detriment of my family. Five years ago, my wife drew the line and we started using an out-of-hours service 10 miles away. This has changed our lives and that of my staff.

Then when I bought a practice 40 miles away, I never even considered anything other than letting a dedicated practice eight miles away, specialising in emergency medicine, do my on call. In fact, by this time I actually considered that if I was to do my own on call, I could be deemed to be "negligent" by the RCVS because the vets on call would have little or no expertise in this field.

My 30 years in practice would allow me to cover all emergencies, no matter what. But what of my poor graduate of only a few years? If he or she made a mistake through inexperience, is that my fault or his or hers? This is where a lot of stress occurs in assistants. The stress experienced by principals is also high and is no longer worth the risk. In addition, it actually costs more to see the clients out of hours than the practice takes in fees.

Clients in Wigan never once complained about a 10-mile hike, because the service and care at the other end made it worth while. In Huddersfield, the culture shock was just that at the start, but now clients know and understand the benefits, and we get no complaints. We actually retain clients better with this service.

In my opinion, the RCVS should make it mandatory that all practices use a dedicated, specialised out-of-hours practice. However, if this was the case, in my opinion, these specialised practices should be inspected and certified by the RCVS to offer just such a service in emergency medicine. Vets Now leads the way in advancing this service with outstanding training for its emergency vets, and it is widening this to the profession generally. I have long advocated that the voluntary Practice Standards Scheme should be mandatory. If practices passed their out-of-hours services on and charged correct fee levels, the life of veterinary surgeons would be very different.

Yours faithfully,

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