

## Proposed veterinary union

Dr Mir (VR, May 9, 2009, vol 164, p 604) has strong grounds to plead that some assistants employed in veterinary practices are being treated unfairly. We know that he has received many reports from disgruntled assistants but the incidence is unquantified. People tend to write letters of complaint rather than praise. As an investigative veterinary journalist I am interested in all points of view, and if anyone wants to present the other side of the picture to provide some balance, perhaps they could e-mail me at the address below.

Coincidentally, a report on the paper presented by David Bartram at the BSAVA Congress on suicide risks in the profession appeared in the same issue of *The Veterinary Record* (p 575). It appears that Dr Mir has a point as Mr Bartram reported that 'the level of support in the workplace was far lower for vets than for the general population'.

There is no doubt that something needs to be done, but it is not in the best interests of those at risk to try to belittle what has gone before. Dr Mir does not help the dialogue by stating it as a fact that 'in spite of vets raising concerns with the BVA in the past, it has always been incapable of addressing their concerns'. That is not a fact! I know the BVA has helped some members but it is unfair to expect it to provide the answers to non-members. Dr Mir is right to advocate a united front to resolve the problem, but the concept of a union is in itself divisive. I know Dr Mir has the best of intentions but a union would have the same problem as the BVA in getting the message across to employers who fail to provide the support assistants need.

The recent publication by the BVA of a booklet on employment contracts for the Young Vet Network is a step forward, as are its plans to involve the SPVS and the Veterinary Practice Management Association as campaign partners in spreading the message. Perhaps BVA Divisions might consider their involvement in their meeting programmes as an important topic for the next 12 months?

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