

Veterinary nurse issues need addressing now

Dear editor,

It saddens me deeply to have to write this letter. I am a qualified, registered veterinary nurse. I qualified in 2007, via the university degree route. I am perturbed by the state of the veterinary nursing "profession" (I use quotation marks here as we are still unrecognised as a profession within our own right). It is my view that there is very limited support for veterinary nurses, and what support there is is often offered by veterinary groups as a half-hearted measure to keep nurses quiet. An example of such support is the Vet Helpline. I am not going to slate this service, but instead point out my concern that there are a large proportion of vets who volunteer to run this, and very few veterinary nurses involved. How is it that a vet can wholeheartedly understand what a veterinary nurse may be going through?

During my time in training practice, I have experienced different set ups of clinics and hospitals. This has helped me to become a very successful locum nurse. Yet, I am startled at how few training practices are available for student nurses to attend. Surely, if there is a demand for veterinary nurses, this is something of great importance that must be rectified, thus assisting veterinary nursing to become more buoyant as a profession.

I am also concerned about the fact that it is possible for those in ivory towers to contemplate changing the NVQ system for something little more than satisfactory to attract new recruits into nursing. The NVQ route has worked well for a number of years. Agreed, it means additional paperwork, but why change a system if it is working well? Surely, important current veterinary nursing issues, such as low pay, poor working conditions and lack of support, are driving hoards of nurses from the profession. It is these areas that should be looked at, if not rectified, before consideration is given to a recruitment drive?

Having completed both the FdSc and the BSc in veterinary nursing, I feel aggrieved that practices dare even say to a degree nurse "you have less experience" in direct comparison to the "day-release" nurse. This cannot be true. All veterinary nurses training via the NVQ route, albeit by day release or as part of a degree course, all have to complete a set amount of time within a training practice.

Another point I believe is valid to raise is that practices are still reluctant to pay more money for a better qualified veterinary nurse. There is still lack of recognition for nurses who choose to further their studies and complete a DipAVN, foundation degree or even the Bachelor's degree in veterinary nursing. I note a comment was made in a copy of *RCVS News* (November issue) that: "Reward isn't just about salary or money for CPD; it's knowing you are a professional working as a valued member of a team..." I totally disagree with this statement. It would appear the RCVS is trying to effectively coerce veterinary nurses over pay by condoning it as okay for practices to pay such poor salaries.

In my opinion, the salaries offered to me cannot even support a mature adult with financial obligations, and it would seem fair to say veterinary nursing is seen as a career for those between the ages of 17 and 25. The salaries offered merely provide "Tampax money" (apologies to male nurses) and more often than not, veterinary nurses have a second or even third job to be able to survive day to day. Reward

is about salary. I would like to see a staged pay scale for all veterinary nurses implemented across the country – yes, including London.

Another point I object to is the issue of CPD requirements. Yes, I agree all who work within the veterinary profession should complete CPD to remain fresh and abreast of new techniques and technology, yet I also strongly oppose the 45 hours over three years' requirement laid down by the RCVS. As a locum veterinary nurse, I do not receive any financial assistance to pay for CPD. Often, CPD costs a lot more than £150 and may last for around three hours. Bearing in mind that if the average veterinary nurse only earns around £15,000 – and you take out travel costs, vehicle maintenance, professional subscriptions, and the cost of living from the remainder – you can see there is not a great deal of money left for anything else. On the other hand, if you are employed as a veterinary nurse by a practice, you may have the opportunity to attend CPD that is provided for you by the practice. Some practices are kind and will offer to pay professional subscriptions in addition to CPD. I would like to see the CPD requirement reduced to a more sensible figure, for instance, 20 hours over three years, in order to let locum nurses afford the cost.

I have worked with vets in practice who think it is okay to dress me down in front of clients in a full reception area (just because I was there), or to have instruments (yes, sharp ones at that) hurled in my direction because they were deemed inadequate for the job they were to be used for. I have also been put in the position of restraining an animal while being subjected to primary-beam radiation. In other situations I have been forced to work beyond my normal working hours to fulfil the needs of a business, yet have been made to feel as if I could lose my job if I dare refuse. These situations have to stop. All vets are aware of what goes on in practice – yes, even those who work with bigger organisations such as the RCVS, BVA and SPVS.

Therefore, I have decided to vote with my feet and I will accompany Dr Shams Mir in his endeavour to form a veterinary union. Yours faithfully,

NAME AND ADDRESS WITHHELD ON REQUEST.

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