

Pressures of practice: empathy and advice

Dear Sir,

The anonymous article on page two of this week's *Veterinary Times* (4th November) entitled "It shouldn't happen to a veterinary surgeon but so often it does..." had a poignant effect on me.

I left practice in 1977, four years after graduating, because I had been ground down by unsympathetic and exploitative practice owners; lack of control over work balance, which was exacerbated by working out of a branch practice to schedules devised by main office secretaries who didn't know how far apart places were and how many appointments and operations I had; gruelling abattoir duty in a constantly combative environment; and a growing feeling of incompetence and inadequacy, which finally overwhelmed me. It reached the stage where looking at job ads added to the depression – things could never be better anywhere else, could they, given my obvious incompetence as a vet?

Moving to industry was a great restorer; but even so, during my seven years there were a couple of periods of exhaustion and depression, produced by lack of support from the company, insufficient manpower to do the jobs that needed doing (for a while the corporate slogan was "do more with less") and bullies, including colleagues in top management.

I'm not sure that the absolute contempt I now have for "users", and the strong belief that we need to do something about mismatches between the mundane realities of practice and over-egged academic requirements for veterinary school entry, correspond to "investing in making the difference positive". I think what makes the difference is a respect for, and a humanistic approach to, other people.

Now, running my own technology and business consultancy, I reckon I have reached the balance where any stress I feel in my job is a product of my own activity, inactivity or procrastination, and not imposed on me by someone else's incompetences and behavioural inadequacies. But if I were ever to find myself in the writer's position, then I think the helplines that are run by vets for vets – and which were not available when I first encountered my practice-induced depression – would make a tremendous difference.

Yours faithfully,

L. P. M. LLOYD-EVANS, MA, VetMB, MRCVS, FBIRA, FRSA,
Managing partner,
BioBridge Associates,
45 St Barnabas Road,
Cambridge CB1 2BX.

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