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'WORRYING' SURGE IN VET HELPLINE CALL VOLUMES

A CONFIDENTIAL charity dedicated to helping vets in crisis has revealed a near tripling of annual contacts to its anonymous helpline over the past three years.

The Vetlife organisation has recorded almost 30,000 visits to its website over that time and, in the past 12 months alone, has received more than 660 calls for help by email and telephone, with mental well-being and financial problems being the two main issues.

In the past year, the independent body – run mainly by trained, but unpaid, veterinary volunteers – has also seen 42 new enquiries for financial assistance and 64 additional health support cases, taking the health care support caseload to above 200.

Vetlife president Geoff Little admitted the figures were “worrying”. He said he did not know whether it was a case of increasing pressure on modern vets resulting in more calls for help, or if vets were now simply more willing to speak out and seek assistance. Dr Little suggested, from his own experience, it was probably a combination of factors.

He said: “I think certain concerns have always been there, but, in the past, it may be people didn't perceive it was correct to share their thoughts. I think the fact we have now got better ways of allowing those people to remain anonymous, in terms of sharing their thoughts, is a good thing.

“We're seeing an increasing number [of enquiries], but we're also seeing an

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increased ability for those people to share their concerns with others.”

Dr Little said, although it was hard to prove, he felt “greater stress” existed among modern vets, along with greater expectations from the public.

He said: “I think the kind of people who become vets are ‘A-type’ people who put a lot of pressure on themselves and, at the same time, have pressure from the outside. In the past, people have kept those pressures bottled up.

“There may not be solutions to all these problems, but the fact people can now feel more comfortable in sharing them has got to be a benefit.”

Help at an earlier stage

Dr Little continued: “Looking at the numbers, it has got to be the case an increased awareness of mental health issues exists. The fact, generally speaking, it's now okay to talk about your mental health and mental issues means we're going to get an ever-increasing number of people coming to us.

“If we can encourage these people to come to us at a much earlier stage and prevent them from becoming cases needing professional help – in terms

of psychiatric help, counselling or even hospitalisation – that's also got to be a good thing.”

Dr Little, who helps run graduate reunions for the Veterinary Defence Society, added: “People contact Vetlife as individuals, but I see another picture when I have 70 people together in a room at a graduate reunion. When you get them talking and chatting about the pressures they face, there is great relief when they realise they are not alone.”

BVA president Gudrun Ravetz said: “These figures show Vetlife is not only providing the support needed for the veterinary community, but veterinary professionals are more aware of the services offered by Vetlife, with individuals realising they can seek help and are not alone.

“In recent years, the veterinary community has come together to ask how we can help improve mental well-being in the profession and what actions we can take to support colleagues and friends, with Vetlife being a vital resource.

“While a continued increase in the figures of those seeking help raises concern, an improved awareness of mental health and well-being, together with more awareness of the services Vetlife offers to veterinary professionals, means more people in the veterinary community may feel able to access Vetlife, which is a positive step towards improving mental health.”

Around 19,700 veterinary surgeons

are registered in the UK. Vetlife estimates these veterinary surgeons have in the region of 29,000 dependants who may be eligible for Vetlife support. A further 4,842 veterinary students and 11,661 veterinary nurses are eligible for a limited amount of non-financial help.

Year-round, 24-hour service

The Vetlife helpline and email response service is available 24 hours a day, year-round and run by a cadre of 30 trained volunteers. The volunteers keep their identity anonymous, but are either veterinary surgeons, veterinary nurses or others who have knowledge of the veterinary profession.

A live answering service is funded by the RCVS to answer telephone calls and either directly forward them to the volunteer on duty or pass on the caller's number to a volunteer to telephone him or her back. If you need confidential support, telephone Vetlife on 0303 040 2551 or email via www.vetlife.org.uk

A HOST of events have been held to celebrate the 225th birthday of the RVC.

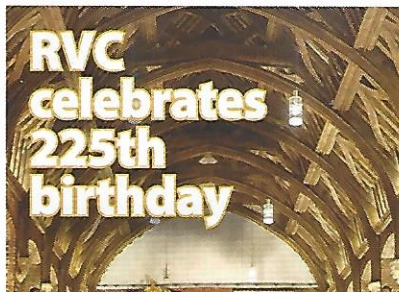
The RVC is the oldest veterinary school in the English-speaking world and the creation of the college in 1791 marked the establishment of the veterinary profession in Britain.

To mark 225 years, the RVC invited alumni back to attend a programme of events for the weekend of 15 to

which has achieved so much over the centuries, with this era of many exciting breakthroughs.

“The college has always looked beyond the horizon to make advancements in science and practice for the benefit of patients and communities globally, yet it is crucial to also recognise the essential contributions of those who have gone before. The early

**RVC
celebrates
225th
birthday**



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