

Initiative to address mental health issues in profession

A MEMBER of the RCVS Governing Council has spoken of his own multiple suicide attempts at the launch of a new joint initiative between vets and doctors designed to tackle mental health stigma in health professions.

David Bartram was speaking at the launch of the new, national "8me" campaign, which encourages prominent members to speak out about their own mental health experiences and encourage others not to "write off" those with mental well-being issues.

No one is immune

In addressing an audience at the Palace of Westminster, Dr Bartram revealed, a number of years ago, he had attempted suicide following the break-up of his marriage.

He said: "I just thought I was stressed – after all, who wouldn't be in those circumstances? But, in fact, I was becoming progressively more unwell. What started as worry, early waking and palpitations –

report by

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which I recognised – led to patterns of thinking that I did not recognise as being disordered. I felt trapped and worthless – suicide was the only escape. From a medical perspective, my biological, social and psychological risk factors had converged and tipped me into major depression.

"That was the first of multiple suicide attempts and several prolonged stays in hospital. Over a three-year period I spent 12 months as a psychiatric inpatient. I was treated with antidepressants, antipsychotics, mood stabilisers, talking therapies and electroconvulsive therapy.

"But now, thankfully, I am well – and I have been for 14 years. To what do I attribute my recovery? A mixture of medical treatment, psycho-

logical therapies, supportive friends and family, rest and time – they all contributed, probably in similar measure."

Dr Bartram, now the director of outcomes research (International operations) for Zoetis, the world's largest producer of medicine and vaccinations for pets and livestock, and former director of the Veterinary Benevolent Fund, added while his episode of mental ill health did not define him, it had changed him in a positive way – and that no one is immune.

The "8me" campaign is a collaboration between the RCVS Mind Matters Initiative, which seeks to address mental health and well-being issues within the veterinary profession, and the Doctors' Support Network (DSN), which provides peer support for doctors and medical students with mental health concerns.

The initiative was officially launched at an event in the House of Commons, sponsored by Labour MP Kevan Jones, who has spoken about his own

experiences with depression.

In introducing the campaign, Mr Jones said: "The key message I have in regards to mental health is talking about it and trying to get it out of the dark corners, rather than it being something you are ashamed to talk about. That is how we get people to help themselves and seek help. The other key thing is not to write people off if they have a mental illness."

Removing barriers

Louise Freeman is vice-chairman of the DSN and was diagnosed with depression in 2009 as a result of the way in which her return to work was handled after having time off as an emergency medicine consultant following a bereavement.

Dr Freeman said: "This experience made me think doctors with mental health problems were in a small minority and it was probably our own fault anyway. Both impressions are completely wrong. The incidence of mental health problems is one in four people in

any one year and is actually higher for doctors, who are often slower to seek help than non-medics. The good news is well supported doctors have excellent treatment outcomes.

"During my own return to work, I was told by my clinical lead they had 'always thought I was a mental health problem waiting to happen'. I think this says more about them than it did about me. On reflection, yes that was true, but only in as much as this applies to all of us during our lives.

"I hope the '8me' campaign can start to address this by encouraging senior health care professionals, who have experienced mental health problems, to disclose they have 'been there themselves'. I think this will help normalise mental ill health for health care professionals and, therefore, remove some of the barriers to unwell professionals seeking help at an earlier stage. Overall, this would be better for health care professionals, their colleagues and their patients."

HOMEOPATHY

Insufficient evidence to support the use of homeopathy in food production as a way to prevent infectious diseases, an article in *Vet Record* has questioned the effectiveness of homeopathy. While some clinicians have questioned the evidence because of a lack of authors analysing the use of homeopathy on homeopathic remedies that has been shown to replace or prevent the use of antibiotics or growth in food-producing animals. "The studies provided a clear favour of homeopathy, reproducibility cannot claim to be a prognostic value."

CAREER BOOST

and training programme has launched a professional development service to help enhance their service will help students move into their career and satisfaction, through existing and up-to-date courses including careers course and "Veterinary medicine to next?" Inter-