

# MMI RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

24 NOVEMBER 2021



# WELCOME

## Dear colleague

I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all, wherever you may be joining us from today, to our third Mind Matters Initiative Mental Health Research Symposium.

This symposium will be a little different from our last, which took place back in 2019. Since then, so much has changed, and we have all had to learn to adapt to this new way of living and working. Having been appointed as Director for the Advancement of the Professions at the RCVS in January 2021, I'm delighted to be overseeing the work of the Mind Matters Initiative and feel privileged to introduce you to some of the brilliant research currently being undertaken in the field of veterinary mental health. The past two years have proven challenging for us all, and it's inspiring to see the continual progress being made in this vital field of research at a time when action and support has never been so important.

The Mind Matters Initiative has three streams of activity: prevent, protect and support. You can read more about this at the back of the programme. We understand that supporting those in need is crucial and that mental health is not a stand alone issue – physical health, mental health, and equality, diversity and inclusion are inextricably linked. It is therefore essential that we work together to support and protect our entire community.

Today, you will hear from a wide range of researchers on a variety of different topics whose work will be relevant for the entire veterinary team. We all play a role in supporting mental health and today's researchers offer a fantastic representation of the entire veterinary community and will offer us a global insight into the world of veterinary mental health research.

Mental health is a global issue, and we can only continue to progress and thrive by coming together and embracing diversity and inclusion in every sense of the word. There is so much to be learned from other people's experiences and I would encourage you to consider how you might take these learnings back into your organisation.

Many thanks to Rosie Allister for putting together such an engaging programme and leading the running of today's symposium, and also to the whole MMI Team, especially Lisa Quigley, Abi Hanson, and the RCVS Communications team, for all their hard work on this.

Finally, I hope you enjoy the day ahead and I look forward to seeing you all in the sessions later today!

Best wishes



**Angharad Belcher**  
Director of the Advancement of the Professions, RCVS



Mental health is a global issue, and we can only continue to progress and thrive by coming together and embracing diversity and inclusion in every sense of the word.

# MMI RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

24 November 2021  
**MMI Research Symposium:  
Programme Summary**

**10:00 – 10:10** **Welcome**  
Professor Susan Dawson, Chair

**10:10 – 11:00** **Plenary: When it is darkest: understanding suicide risk**  
Professor Rory O'Connor

**11:00 – 11:15** **Break**

## **Sarah Brown Research Grant Talks:**

**11:15 – 11:40** **Experiences of racism and its impacts on mental wellbeing in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people working and studying in the UK veterinary sector**  
Dr Victoria Crossley and Dr Navaratnam Partheeban

**11:40 – 12:05** **Experiences and impact of moral injury in UK veterinary professional wellbeing**  
Dr Victoria Williamson

**12:05 – 12:30** **How farm vets cope: an exploration of how vets cope with the daily challenges of farm animal practice and how best these coping mechanisms might be developed into tools which can be easily accessed by the livestock veterinary community**  
Dr Kate Stephen

**12:30 – 13:00** **Lunch**

# Programme summary cont.

## 13:00 – 14:00 Research Talks – Session 1

### Stream A

(Chair - Katie Moore, Director Vetlife)

**13:00 – 13:15** **Cyberbullying and mental wellbeing of veterinarians in Hong Kong – an exploratory qualitative study**  
Kuen Yu Camille Chan

**13:15 – 13:30** **Veterinary intern & resident wellbeing: we need change, STAT!**  
Makenzie Peterson

**13:30 – 13:45** **Understanding and supporting veterinary mental health**  
Dr Nadine Hamilton

**13:45 – 14:00** **Q&A**

### Stream B

(Chair - Mandisa Greene, RCVS Senior Vice-President)

**13:00 – 13:15** **Integrated mental health awareness teaching in the veterinary undergraduate curriculum**  
Brad Hill

**13:15 – 13:30** **Perception and impact of online mental health awareness teaching in year 1 during the pandemic**  
Dr Sabine Töttemeyer

**13:30 – 13:45** **The effects of an exercise programme on the mental wellbeing of veterinary students**  
Fergus Mitchell

**13:45 – 14:00** **Q&A**

### Stream C

(Chair - Kate Richards, RCVS President)

**13:00 – 13:15** **Do registered veterinary nurses feel stigmatised by acknowledging stress and accessing support?**  
Anna Garrity

**13:15 – 13:30** **The veterinary triad in balint work: about professional relationships to pets and their owners**  
Dr Veerle Van Geenhoven

**13:30 – 13:45** **Work engagement and its link to retention in uk practising veterinary surgeons**  
Dr Sharon Cooksey

**13:45 – 14:00** **Q&A**

## 14:00 - 14:15 Break

## 14:15 – 15:15 Research Talks – Session 2

### Stream A

(Chair - Rosie Allister, Vetlife Helpline Manager)

**14:15 – 14:30** **The relationship between patient safety culture and staff burnout. Conundrum or cure?**  
Dr Mark Turner

**14:30 – 14:45** **Mindset, resilience and perception of reaction to workplace challenge in RVNs**  
Charlotte Bullard

**14:45 – 15:00** **An explanatory research on satisfaction in the Dutch veterinary practice**  
Kris van den Bogaard and Dr Jos Schijns

**15:00 – 15:15** **Q&A**

## 15:15 – 15:30 Break

## 15:30 – 16:00 Mind Matters Initiative Talk

## 16:00 Close

### Stream B

(Chair – James Russell, Senior Vice-President, British Veterinary Association)

**14:15 – 14:30** **Students' perceptions of using two mental health apps during the Covid-19 pandemic**  
Kirstie Pickles

**14:30 – 14:45** **Using a co-created interactive game to engage students with mental health awareness**  
Dr Sabine Töttemeyer and Georgina Bladon

**14:45 – 15:00** **Emotional intelligence and its relationship with work engagement amongst veterinary surgeons in UK veterinary practice**  
Dr Sharon Cooksey

**15:00 – 15:15** **Q&A**

# PLENARY SPEAKERS

## When it is darkest: Understanding Suicide Risk

**Professor Rory O'Connor PhD FAcSS,**  
**Professor of Health Psychology at**  
**the University of Glasgow, President**  
**of the International Association for**  
**Suicide Prevention**



Rory O'Connor PhD FAcSS is Professor of Health Psychology at the University of Glasgow in Scotland, President of the International Association for Suicide Prevention and a Past President of the International Academy of Suicide Research.

Rory leads the Suicidal Behaviour Research Laboratory (Web: [www.suicideresearch.info](http://www.suicideresearch.info); Twitter: @suicideresearch) at Glasgow, one of the leading suicide/self-harm research groups in UK. He also leads the Mental Health & Wellbeing Research Group at Glasgow.

He has published extensively in the field of suicide and self-harm, specifically concerning the psychological processes which precipitate suicidal behaviour and self-harm. He is also co-author/editor of several books and is author of *When It is Darkest. Why People Die by Suicide* and *What We Can Do To Prevent It* (2021).

Rory is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Archives of Suicide Research* and Associate Editor of *Suicide and Life-Threatening Behavior*. He acts as an advisor to a range of national and international organisations including national governments on the areas of suicide and self-harm. He is also Co-Chair of the Academic Advisory Group to the Scottish Government's National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group.

## The Mind Matters Initiative Talk

**Angharad Belcher BMedSci PGDip,**  
**RCVS Director for Advancement of**  
**the Professions**



Angharad Belcher joined the RCVS as Director for Advancement of the Professions in January 2021, with the responsibility for leading a number of College projects founded to support the professions and animal health and welfare including the Mind Matters Initiative, the ViVet innovation initiative, the RCVS Fellowship, Sustainability, Leadership and the Diversity & Inclusion Strategy.

She was previously Head of Partnerships and Head of Congress at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association (BSAVA) where she led Congress' move to Manchester after 30 years in Birmingham. She also led the design of the 2021 Virtual event, oversaw Congress' rebrand, and as Head of Partnerships formed strategic partnerships across the veterinary world. During her time at BSAVA she was most known for driving sustainability and diversity projects through

Congress and across the BSAVA as well as supporting a range of veterinary initiatives in this space such as Paddle Against Plastic, Learning Without Landfill, Vetlife and the British Ethnicity & Diversity Society (BVEDS).

Prior to BSAVA she had experience of PR, communications and strategic planning across the agricultural and veterinary sector. In all her work she has made it her mission to bring people together to share ideas, challenges and solutions.

## MMI Chair

**Professor Susan Dawson BVMS, PhD,**  
**FRCVS, Chair RCVS Mind Matter**  
**Initiative**



Professor Susan Dawson is Dean of the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Liverpool. She qualified as a veterinary surgeon from Glasgow in 1983 and spent several years in veterinary practice before joining the University of Liverpool in 1988. Her research is in infectious diseases with a focus on zoonotic infections and antimicrobial resistance in particular.

Professor Dawson was a Council member of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS) for 11 years stepping down in July 2021. She has chaired Education Committee for RCVS and has been a panel member and chair of accreditation visits of veterinary schools on behalf of the Royal College. Susan is a Non-Executive Director at Pets at Home and Chair of the Volunteer Development Committee at the British Small Animal Veterinary Association.

Since taking on the role of Dean of the School of Veterinary Science, Professor Dawson has led the introduction of a new curriculum to the BVSc programme and has managed a significant increase in student numbers onto the programme. Susan has been a member of the Mind Matters Initiative Taskforce since its instigation and was proud to take over as Chair from Professor Stuart Reid in September 2019.

# SARAH BROWN RESEARCH GRANT TALKS

11:15-12:30

## **Sarah Brown Research Grant Talks**

The Sarah Brown Mental Health Research Grant was founded in 2019, in memory of RCVS Council member Sarah Brown who passed away in 2017.

The RCVS Mind Matters Initiative committed to awarding a total of five £20,000 grants to help fund research focusing on mental health and wellbeing in the veterinary professions, including areas such as prevention, diagnosis, intervention and treatment. However, due to the pandemic, in 2020 an extra grant was awarded bringing the total number of funded research projects up to six. Applications for the 2022 grants will open in the Spring.

11:15-11:40

## **RG 1: Experiences of racism and its impacts on mental wellbeing in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people working and studying in the UK veterinary sector**

*Dr Victoria Crossley BSc BVM&S PGCertVetEd PhD FHEA MRCVS*

*Navaratnam Partheeban BVM&S BSc(Hons) PGCert(DHH) PIAGrM FRSA MRCVS*

Victoria graduated from the University of Edinburgh in 2009 and worked for four years in small animal practice before taking up the post of Pfizer Feline Fellow at the University of Bristol. In 2014, she undertook a PhD investigating the aetiology of feline hyperthyroidism at the Royal Veterinary College, where she subsequently worked as Impact Case Manager whilst teaching and tutoring on the BVetMed course. Victoria is currently Teaching Fellow in Research Impact and Cornerstone at Imperial College, London.

Navaratnam is a farm vet. He is dedicated to working to support the sector in helping attract people from non-traditional backgrounds. This has included being a trustee of a City Farm and the Country Trust.

Navaratnam is a co-founder of the British Veterinary Ethnicity and Diversity Society (BVEDS) and a founding BiPOC Working Group member at the Land Workers Alliance (LWA). He was recognised as an Oxford Farming Emerging Leader in 2020. As a Nuffield Farming Scholar 2021, he is completing his project on looking at "Promoting and supporting ethnic minorities in the agricultural, farming and veterinary sector."

### **Abstract:**

*Experiences of racism and its impacts on mental wellbeing in Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people working and*

*studying in the UK veterinary sector*

The UK veterinary sector has some huge challenges when it comes to Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion. Over the last few years, the issue of prejudice and discrimination based on race and ethnicity has been highlighted by the BVEDS. There has been very limited research investigating racism in the veterinary profession, and no research to date has examined the impact of racism among the victims in the veterinary sector. Our current research addresses this gap, and investigates the effect that racism has on individuals from BAME backgrounds by analysing open-text questionnaire data using thematic analysis. In this session, we will outline the methods used and share the findings from qualitative data analysis that concentrated on examining the psychological impact of racism. We hope that this research will empower others to work on this issue and that the findings will help to direct effective and positive action to break down barriers and create a fair and inclusive culture in the veterinary sector for all, regardless of race or ethnicity.

11:40-12:05

## **RG 2: Experiences and impact of moral injury in UK veterinary professional wellbeing**

*Dr Victoria Williamson*

Victoria is a research fellow at King's College London and the University of Oxford. She completed her PhD at the University of Bath in 2016, which examined parental responses following child experiences of trauma. At King's College London, Victoria's research focuses on psychological adjustment after traumatic events, including combat trauma, human trafficking and moral injury. At the University of Oxford, her research aims to identify effective approaches to screen for child mental health difficulties in schools and deliver an accessible intervention to support child adjustment.

### **Abstract:**

*Experiences and impact of moral injury in UK veterinary professional wellbeing*

**Background:** Veterinary professionals (VPs) are often exposed to distressing and ethically challenging events in their line of work, yet little is known about whether they may experience moral injury and the impact potentially morally injurious events (PMIEs) may have on their wellbeing. This cross-sectional study aimed to examine the association between PMIEs and the mental health outcomes of UK VPs.

**Method:** Assessments of PMIE exposure and

# SARAH BROWN RESEARCH GRANT TALKS

self-report measures of common mental disorders were administered using an anonymous online questionnaire to 90 UK VPs between December 2020-May 2021.

**Results:** Exposure to PMIEs was reported by almost all VPs (89.0%), with acts of omission most frequently reported. Experiences of PMIEs were significantly associated with symptoms of PTSD ( $p < 0.01$ ) and the likelihood of meeting PTSD case criteria was greatest in those VPs exposed to betrayal and perpetration events. However, there was no significant association found between PMIE exposure and alcohol misuse or CMD ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** This study provides some of the first evidence that experiences of moral injury are significantly associated with adverse mental health outcomes in UK VPs. Future work is needed to design effective pathways for prevention and intervention for VPs exposed to highly challenging events.

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12:05-12:30

**RG 3: How farm vets cope: An exploration of how vets cope with the daily challenges of farm animal practice and how best these coping mechanisms might be developed into tools which can be easily accessed by the livestock veterinary community**

*Dr Kate Stephen*

Kate is an experienced qualitative social scientist and project manager. Based in the Epidemiology Research Unit, Inverness in the Scottish Highlands, Kate's work involves an holistic view of human behaviour in the context of livestock disease, focusing on biosecurity practices and antimicrobial use. Informed by her research background in rural Public Health, she tries to adopt a farmer/vet-centric approach and is involved in the development of preventative and self-management mental health interventions in farming communities.

**Overview:** This presentation will include a brief overview of the project including what the research team hoped to do, what they did, what they found out, and what they produced ([www.howfarmvetsscope.co.uk](http://www.howfarmvetsscope.co.uk)).



# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 1A

## 13:00-14:00 Research Talks Session 1A

Katie Moore, Director Vetlife

### 13:00-13:15 IA.1 - Cyberbullying and mental wellbeing of veterinarians in Hong Kong – an exploratory qualitative study

Camille K Y Chan BBus

Camille is a PhD candidate of the University of Hong Kong, and her research interest focuses on the mental wellbeing of veterinarians in Hong Kong. She developed her research interest because of her personal experience of working with medical professionals and her passion was ignited by the neglected distress observed among the veterinary profession. She has completed a qualitative study on cyberbullying and mental wellbeing of vets in Hong Kong and will embark her study journey to explore ways to improve vets' mental wellbeing. She hopes that her study's findings can enhance the mental health of the veterinary profession locally and globally.

#### Abstract:

*Cyberbullying and mental wellbeing of veterinarians in Hong Kong – an exploratory qualitative study*

**Background:** The mental health of veterinarians in Hong Kong is highly neglected and under researched. Their mental health are impacted by the unique stressors, eg sky-high rental costs, the aftermath of potentially losing clients, and the convenience of vet-hopping'.

**Aims and objectives:** This exploratory qualitative study aims to examine the impact of an emerging phenomenon - cyberbullying - and its role in affecting the mental wellbeing of veterinarians in Hong Kong.

**Methods:** Individual in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 veterinarians between December 2020 and April 2021. They were recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed using the constructivist grounded theory approach.

**Results:** Preliminary analysis identified three core categories that facilitated the prevalence of cyberbullying among veterinarians in Hong Kong: (1) the local competitive business culture, (2) clients' expectations on veterinarians' expertise, efficiency, and worthiness of costs, and (3) the convenient information sharing platform among pet owners using social media. Having a supportive working environment and good team spirit had remedial roles in reducing the distress when they were cyberbullied.

**Discussion:** The proximity between veterinary practices manifested business competition within the profession. The absence of regulatory restriction in veterinary practice ownership concerns the profession if business investors were not trained veterinary medicine, due to possible discrepancy of ethical boundaries and legal-liability responsibility. The arguably light punishment in Hong Kong of veterinarians' disciplinary offences and the lingering inquiry process stimulated pet owners' seeking alternative methods serving justice for their misfortunate experience. Further research is needed to help understanding the institutional impact of the veterinary profession on their occupational stress.

### 13:15-13:30

### IA.2 – Veterinary intern & resident wellbeing: we need change, STAT!

Makenzie Peterson

As a member of their senior leadership team, Makenzie serves as the Director for Wellbeing at the Association of American Veterinary Medical Colleges (AAVMC). She works to advance AAVMC's strategic goal of fostering a culture of wellbeing throughout academic veterinary medicine by promoting preventative systems-based initiatives. Makenzie provides subject-matter expertise on the science and application of evidence-based wellbeing practices, as well as the development and implementation of strategic organizational changes to improve the overall wellbeing of academic communities. She speaks on a variety of wellbeing-related topics, and also currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Women's Veterinary Leadership Development Initiative. Born and raised in Alaska, Makenzie graduated from the University of Utah with a Master's degree in Health Promotion & Health Education and will complete her Doctorate of Social Work from the University of Southern California in 2022.

#### Abstract:

*Veterinary intern & resident wellbeing: we need change, STAT!*

**Objective:** Improving wellbeing among veterinary trainees is a key area of interest for veterinary organizations, training programs, and employers. Many wellbeing interventions in veterinary medicine focus on individual behavioral care for veterinary students and professionals with less attention on the effects of social, economic, and professional environmental factors. The American



# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 1A

Association of Veterinary Medical Colleges seeks to comprehensively characterise wellbeing and associated factors.

**Sample:** 474 veterinary interns and residents in US-based training programs at veterinary colleges, private practices, and corporate practices in December 2020.

**Procedures:** A survey of validated instruments to evaluate depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, burnout, and social supports as well as work hours, sleep, access to mental health resources, physical wellbeing, and training program environment.

**Results:** Results show high rates of depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, experience of traumatic events, perceptions of poor physical wellbeing, and burnout. Responses varied by specialty area, employment setting, gender, and partnership status. Respondents who identified as female, single, and/or disabled generally had more severe depression scores than their counterparts. Respondents who reported higher satisfaction with their programmes were more likely to cite quality mentoring, structured learning, dedication to teaching, supportive workplace environments, capped work hours, protected time off, adequate staffing, accessible mental health support, affirming feedback and professional autonomy in open-ended questions.

**Conclusion:** The AAVMC proposes institutions develop organizational-level interventions that diminish or eliminate the root causes of health inequities and supports upstream interventions that focus on prevention to address the health and learning gaps that exist for veterinary interns and residents.

works tirelessly to advocate for veterinary wellbeing and the paradigm shift she believes is needed to facilitate positive change within the profession.

## **Abstract:**

*Understanding and supporting veterinary mental health*  
My doctoral research examined the phenomenology of being a veterinarian, and in particular, the factors relating to aspects of the job that are stressful and potentially life-threatening, particularly performing euthanasia. There were two separate but related studies in this research project. First, it was expected that by interviewing veterinarians one-on-one, further insight into the contributing factors of veterinarian stress, depression, burnout, and suicide could be identified. Therefore, Study 1 comprised face-to-face and telephone interviews with practising veterinarians in Australia where they were asked a series of questions pertaining to the reported demands of their job, and subsequent factors believed to be affecting their level of wellbeing. Subsequently, these results led to the development of a one-day psycho-educational intervention programme. Participants' reactions to the psycho-educational intervention programme were the focus of Study 2. It was expected that veterinarians would demonstrate a negative emotional response to performing euthanasia on animals, as well as experience enhanced wellbeing and coping by attending the psycho-educational intervention program. Participants were taught evidence-based psychological strategies based on the principles of acceptance and commitment therapy and positive psychology, as well as many other beneficial skills. Results from Study 2 returned statistically significant results when addressing depression, anxiety, stress and negative affect. As a result of this research project, it is evident that more needs to be done to address the reported negative aspects of being a veterinarian, and in particular, there needs to be more intervention programmes available to help our veterinarians learn key psychological strategies to enable them to cope more effectively. It is recommended that the psycho-educational intervention programmes used in this research project be one of them.

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## **13:30-13:45 IA.3 – Understanding and supporting veterinary mental health**

*Dr Nadine Hamilton BSc (Psych) PGDipPsych  
MTrain&Dev EdD MAAPi*

Nadine helps veterinary professionals get on top of stress and conflict to avoid burnout and suicide, and works with practice managers and owners to increase wellbeing, productivity, and retention in the workplace. She has successfully completed doctoral research into veterinarian wellbeing and is the proud founder and CEO of the charity "Love Your Pet Love Your Vet". She released her bestselling book "Coping with Stress and Burnout as a Veterinarian" in 2019 and won the Blackmores Mercie Whellan Women+Wellbeing Award in 2020. Dr Hamilton

# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 1B

## 13:00-14:00 Research Talks Session 1B

*Dr Mandisa Greene, RCVS Senior Vice-President*

### 13:00-13:15 IB.2 - Integrated mental health awareness in the veterinary undergraduate curriculum

*Brad Hill BVetMed MRCVS FHEA*

Brad is an equine vet who has over ten years' experience within the profession as a practising clinician having worked in several different workplace settings. At Nottingham he sits within the mental health team, is a mental health first aid instructor and an EDI champion. He also has written a blog for the British Veterinary Association (BVA) sharing his experiences of mental health, stigma, and the need to endeavour to make cultural change. He is passionate about preparing graduates for practice, ensuring they feel capable and confident of bringing their whole selves to their chosen careers.

#### **Abstract:**

*Integrated mental health awareness in the veterinary undergraduate curriculum*

**Background:** Mental health awareness has become increasingly relevant in the undergraduate curriculum following strong evidence of elevated levels of stress and depression in veterinary students and the veterinary profession. Better preparation of undergraduate students for the challenges of a career as a veterinary professional has been suggested as one response to improve wellbeing within the profession.

**Aim:** To develop an embedded mental health awareness module within the undergraduate curriculum at the University of Nottingham and to assess students' attitudes to this module.

**Methods:** Compulsory teaching sessions were developed and delivered across the curriculum using a range of media, small group discussion and peer facilitation. Sessions included topics such as Life Balance and Developing Resilience (Y1), Mental Health Awareness (common disorders, stigma and support) (Y1&2), Strategies for Maintaining Mental Flexibility (Y5) and Resilience in Clinical Practice (Y5). Feedback was obtained after teaching using Forms questionnaires to determine students' perceptions of these sessions.

**Results:** Year 1 and 2 students found information on mental health conditions and discussions around relatable scenarios helpful and enjoyed the opportunity to talk to older year students peer-

facilitating the sessions. The majority of 5th year students rated sessions as good or very good. Common themes across feedback included 'relevant content', 'increased knowledge', 'reduced stigma', 'really helpful, and 'really useful'.

**Discussion and conclusions:** The integrated module continues to be developed and assessed. The majority of students appear to value mental health awareness sessions in the veterinary curriculum.

### 13:15-13:30 IB.1 - Perception and impact of online mental health awareness teaching in year 1 during the pandemic

*Sabine Töttemeyer DiplBiol PhD MA(Higher Ed) SFHEA*

Sabine joined School of Veterinary Medical Science, University of Nottingham, in 2006 just before the first vet students arrived and has been involved in facilitating professional skills and student wellbeing sessions from the beginning. She trained as a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) instructor in 2017 and is the MHFA lead for the vet school and a member of the MHFA team. The team plan, evaluate and deliver teaching as well as MHFA events for staff and students. Sabine is the module convener for the integrated module 'Student wellbeing & mental health awareness'. Sabine loves to engage students into the topic by co-creating teaching materials and using gamification and peer facilitation.

#### **Abstract:**

*Perception and impact of online mental health awareness teaching in year 1 during the pandemic*

Recent studies into mental health of the veterinary community, including surveys by the BVA/Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) have shown veterinary students experience a high prevalence of several mental health issues, limiting them both academically and socially. Mental health awareness teaching (MHAT), which is most effective in young people, can address the stigma surrounding mental health that may deter students from accessing crucial support services.

This study aims to investigate whether MHAT improves the knowledge and understanding of mental health in veterinary students. Workshops covered stigma, stress, current challenges, wellbeing strategies, and student support services. For the first cohort these workshops were delivered directly after the lockdown in March & April 2020 when the university

# RESEARCH TALKS

## SESSION 1B

closed. For the second cohort, the workshop was still delivered remotely whilst students had both, online and face-to-face teaching, on campus. Students completed a questionnaire after the workshop, rating their knowledge and understanding before and after the session and applied their knowledge to four different scenarios.

There was a significant increase in students that rated themselves of high knowledge for all aspects of mental health awareness after teaching, especially the knowledge of the support systems within vet school and university. In the scenario-based questions, most students offered personal support and a proportion of students signposted to appropriate support systems, particularly around issues to do with placements, less so for wellbeing support.

MHA teaching provided a forum to provide information about mental health conditions. In addition, students appreciated the feel of community and peer support it promoted.

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### 13:30-13:45 **IB.3 - The effects of an exercise programme on the mental wellbeing of veterinary students**

*Fergus Mitchell BVMedSci (Hons)*

Fergus is a 4th year vet student at the University of Nottingham and as part of his undergraduate degree researched into how regular exercise can have an effect on veterinary students' mental health and wellbeing. Fergus' work was inspired by the results of the VetFit Study and as a strong advocate for bettering mental health within universities and the wider profession, he enjoyed undertaking the research. Away from university life Fergus loves running, walking, cricket and playing music too.

#### **Abstract:**

*The effects of an exercise programme on the mental wellbeing of veterinary students*

**Background:** The challenging demands of the veterinary course can have an impact on students' mental health, highlighting the importance of research interventions that help support their mental wellbeing.

**Objectives:** This mixed-methods study aimed to investigate the effects an eight-week exercise programme had on the mental wellbeing of first year, female, University of Nottingham veterinary students.

**Study design:** Participants (n=12) who self-

perceived themselves as exercising minimally, completed questionnaires before, during and after the exercise programme.

**Methods:** Quantitative data were obtained through the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) and five-point Likert-scale surveys which were included in the questionnaires. The five-point Likert scale surveys assessed the participants' opinions on multiple aspects of the programme. Reflexive thematic analysis was conducted on free-response questions included in each questionnaire.

**Results:** Over 72% of participants experienced an individual positive change in mental wellbeing according to the WEMWBS score differences over the duration of the programme. From the thematic analysis, four main themes were revealed. These included: self-awareness of mental wellbeing, the perceived sense of community created by the programme, the positive effects of exercise and how a similar programme could be modified.

**Conclusions:** The results of this study suggest that the exercise programme was effective in supporting the mental wellbeing of veterinary students and can help shape future strategies to support students' mental wellbeing at veterinary school. Aspects of the exercise programme such as creating a sense of community and giving students structured time to exercise are important factors in supporting their mental wellbeing.

# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 1C

## 13:00-14:00 Research Talks Session 1C

Dr Kate Richards, RCVS President

### 13:00-13:15 IC.1 - Do registered veterinary nurses feel stigmatised by acknowledging stress and accessing support?

Anna Garrity BSc (Hons) VN RVN

Anna is currently Head Veterinary Nurse at Medivet, Orrell Park. She studied at Myerscough School of Veterinary Nursing and qualified in 2017 with an FdSc Veterinary Nursing and proceeded to top up to her Bachelor of Science Honours.

Since leaving university, she has gained experience in small animal practice before accepting her HVN role. She has held the position of Wellbeing Champion since 2019 and has a strong passion for this area since her dissertation research. She is planning on carrying out further study for her master's degree and aims to further improve wellbeing and mental health within the veterinary sector.

#### Abstract:

*Do Registered Veterinary Nurses Feel Stigmatised by Acknowledging Stress and Accessing Support?*

There are ever-increasing demands on RVNs, it is self-evident that the mounting pressure within practice brings a significant amount of increased stress. Staff moral and job satisfaction should be examined by employers to maintain and develop RVNs further, individually and as a team. The provision of relevant and useful support services for staff members needs to be in place. Consciousness of stress related to the RVN culture should be examined and addressed accordingly.

Demands are ever increasing on the veterinary community and certainly on RVNs, it is undeniable that with pressures mounting within practice there is a substantial amount of increased stress. Establishing relevant and pertinent staff support services is important and needs to be put in place to help the RVN community. RVNs should all be part of a nurturing ethos embraced by all involved to guarantee that nurses are valued and supported to an optimum. The aim of the research was to build awareness within the nursing community of mental health to demote stigmatisation and promote help seeking.

The study was conducted to investigate RVNS'

attitude to work-related stress and accessing support provisions to identify stigma. The results of the survey were good, as over 130 respondents were identified as using the website and completing the questionnaire. This response rate ensured that a quantitative and qualitative method of data collection could be performed.

The issue of stigma when in relation to work-related stress and help-seeking behaviours in the nursing profession needs further attention.

### 13:15-13:30 IC.2 - The veterinary triad in balint work: about professional relationships to pets and their owners

Veerle Van Geenhoven, Senior Veterinarian PD Dr phil habil Mvetmed

Veerle is affiliated as a senior veterinarian at the Center for Clinical Veterinary Medicine, that is part of the Veterinary Department at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University Munich (Germany). She is currently leading the Small Mammals Department. She holds a Bachelor degree in Veterinary Sciences from Antwerp University (Belgium) and a Master's Degree in Veterinary Medicine from Ghent University (Belgium). Her veterinary career was preceded by a career as a linguist. She received an MA in Germanic and Computational Linguistics from the University of Louvain (Belgium) and a Doctoral Degree in General Linguistics from the Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen (Germany). She held positions at the University of Louvain (B), the University of Stuttgart (D), the University Bielefeld (D), the Max-Planck-Institute for Psycholinguistics in Nijmegen (NL), the Radboud-University Nijmegen (NL) and the University of California at Santa Cruz (USA). She completed her habilitation at the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-University in Frankfurt, where she got the title of Private Lecturer in Linguistics.

#### Abstract:

*The Veterinary Triad in Balint Work: About Professional Relationships to Pets and their Owners*

Therapeutic relationships in veterinary medicine are often embedded in a multi-relational setting, minimally involving a veterinarian, a pet patient, and the pet's owner, as well as the various interactions between these agents. The complexity of this setting puts an additional strain on the core of a veterinarian's

# RESEARCH TALKS

## SESSION 1C

primary task, which is to provide adequate medical care, diagnostics and a therapy plan for each of his patients.

Starting from the perspective of the veterinary triad presented in Van Geenhoven (2021), it is argued that veterinarians can prevent themselves from becoming emotionally lost in their professional relationships in that they learn to understand the psychodynamic processes triggered by these relationships. In order to achieve this goal so that its results can be integrated in their daily work, veterinarians should be familiarised with professionalised psychosocial competence and master the basic concepts of psychodynamic processes. Making use of psychoanalytic tools, Balint group work with peers could serve as a means to reflect the complexity of professional relationships in veterinary medicine. Emotionally stressful interactions would be disentangled in this way. A strengthening of mental health would be achieved.

### References:

Van Geenhoven, V. (2021) *About Professional Relationships with Pets and their Owners: The Veterinary Triad and its Implications for Balint Work*. *Balint-Journal* 2021; 22: 1–11 (appears in the December volume)

13:30-13:45

### 1C.3 - Work engagement and its link to retention in UK practising veterinary surgeons

Sharon Cooksey BVSc MBA MRCVS

Sharon began working as a houseman at the RVC Equine and Large Animal unit and then moved into mainly equine practice for 16 years. In the late 2000s a move into the pharmaceutical industry brought experience in technical, sales and marketing management roles and led to a desire to understand more about particularly the human component of businesses. In December 2020 she gained an MBA distinction from the University of Liverpool and was awarded student of the year. In 2021 she began a PhD to discover a robust measure for, and the drivers of wellbeing (engagement) in UK practising vets.

### Abstract:

*Work engagement and its link to retention in UK practising veterinary surgeons*

Few published studies specific to the veterinary profession concerning robust outcomes are shown to have a measurable association with the professional

non-technical competencies generally considered to enable individuals to thrive in the role of veterinary surgeon.

This study proposes engagement, measured using the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale<sup>1</sup> is a robust outcome against which interventions aimed to improve life in practice might be assessed.

Engagement with one's work ('WE') has been described as "a fulfilling work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication and absorption"<sup>1</sup>. A precise definition of WE remains elusive, but not disputed is that it can be seen and felt by employer and worker alike<sup>2</sup>. High-level WE fulfils, absorbs and invigorates employees and thus, they experience significantly improved wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

Using quantitative methods for data collection and statistical analysis the study examined WE in UK practising vets. In comparison to UWES-9 international database norms<sup>5</sup>, the study group showed a statistically significantly higher WE-Total score. A significant finding as WE in vets has previously been reported as lower than database norms<sup>6</sup>.

However, when WE was examined in more detail at WE-dimension level; WE-Vigour scores were statistically significantly lower than norms, and WE-Dedication and -Absorption statistically significantly higher.

Alongside the individual benefits of WE, lie rewards which engaged employees bring to organisations, eg competitive advantage and superior performance<sup>4</sup>. A statistically significant, positive and proportional relationship was found between intention-to-remain and WE in the study, implying that initiatives which increase WE might be a constructive solution towards retention in practice.

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# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 1C

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3. Shuck, B. and Reio, T. G. (2014) 'Employee Engagement and Wellbeing: A Moderation Model and Implications for Practice', *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 21(1), pp. 43–58. doi: 10.1177/1548051813494240

4. (Albrecht and Marty 2020)

5. Schaufeli, W.B. and Bakker, A.B. (2004) UWES; Utrecht Work Engagement Scale. Available at <https://www.wilmarschaufeli.nl/publications/Schaufeli/Test%20Manuals/TestmanualUWSEnglish.pdf> (accessed 01 November 2019)

6. Mastenbroek, N. J. J. M., Jaarsma, A.D.C., Demerouti, E., Muijtjens, A.M.M., Scherpbier, A.J.J.A. and van Beukelen, P. (2014a) 'Burnout and Engagement, and its Predictors in Young Veterinary Professionals: The Influence of Gender', *Veterinary Record*, 174(6), pp. 144–150. doi: 10.1136/vr.101762



# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 2A

1415-1515

## Research Talks Session 2A

Dr Rosie Allister, Vetlife Helpline Manager

14:15-14:30

### 2A.1 - The relationship between patient safety culture and staff burnout: conundrum or cure?

Mark Turner BVSc MRes MRCVS

Mark graduated from Liverpool veterinary school in 1996 and entered small animal practice in London where he still lives. After several first opinion posts and a spell running a practice, he became interested in patient safety and quality improvement (QI). In 2017 he graduated from the Royal Veterinary College with a Research Masters degree in patient safety culture and currently splits his time between clinical work, and writing on the subjects of patient safety and QI. He is also interested in the relationship between veterinary patient safety culture and staff engagement, wellbeing and productivity.

#### Abstract:

*The relationship between patient safety culture and staff burnout: conundrum or cure?*

**Background:** Various factors play a role in the delicate balance between staff engagement and its antithesis – burnout. These factors include an ability to participate in decisions; and physical workload. The incidence of burnout in the veterinary profession is believed to be high, with one recent report from the US suggesting that veterinarians experience burnout more frequently than doctors.

Meanwhile, patient safety culture can be defined as the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of workers that expedite high quality clinical care. These behaviours include the ability to feedback suggestions for quality improvement, and appropriate work schedules. Significantly, there is evidence of a relationship between patient safety culture and burnout in human medicine.

**Aims:** In this session we will explore burnout and patient safety, and describe the results of recent research into veterinary patient safety culture.

**Methods:** An on-line 77-item, modified medical patient safety culture survey was disseminated to vets, registered nurses, practice managers, and business partners.

**Results:** A total of 335 surveys were completed. The results suggested that staff sometimes feel unable

to speak up with comments; and that lack of time may be affecting care quality.

**Discussion:** Cultural factors that may be affecting patient safety in veterinary practice – including hierarchy and workload – resemble antecedents of burnout. Could the high levels of work-place stress documented in the veterinary profession then be related to contemporary patient safety culture? We will end by considering ways of improving safety culture and hence reducing burnout, and discuss the potential benefits for organisations of pursuing patient safety as a strategic objective.

14:30-14:45

### 2A.2 - Mindset, resilience and perception of/ reaction to workplace challenge in RVNs

Charlotte Bullard (Hons) PGDip VetEd FHEA EEBW

Charlotte originally began her career in equine science before finding her niche in education. First programme managing for an equine training provider in Suffolk, overseeing and teaching equine therapy and veterinary nursing students, Charlotte later joined the British Veterinary Nursing Association as Education Manager in 2019. She will be due to complete her MSc in Veterinary Education from the Royal Veterinary College in autumn 2021, where she completed research in mindset and resilience in RVNs. Charlotte is particularly interested in collaborative working within VN education, alongside the relationships between training, career resilience and retention within the VN profession.

#### Abstract:

*Mindset, resilience and perception of/reaction to workplace challenge in RVNs*

**Background:** The veterinary workplace can be complex and challenging; some struggle more than others to operate under such conditions. Veterinary nurses (RVNs) are reporting increased job stress and dissatisfaction (Institute for Employment Studies, 2019). Identifying the characteristics and skills that help RVNs thrive in the face of workplace challenge is useful for RVNs, educators and employers.

**Research question:** Is there a link between mindset, resilience and perceptions of/reactions to workplace challenge in RVNs?

**Method:** An online survey was distributed to UK RVNs in Spring 2021; collecting demographics, mindset types, resilience scores and experiences of workplace challenge.

**Results:** Preliminary results reveal a weak

# RESEARCH TALKS

## SESSION 2A

correlation between mindset and resilience. Growth mindset individuals reported a predominance of motivating/satisfying events at work more often than fixed mindset individuals. Despite the majority of respondents reporting growth mindsets/normal levels of resilience, reactions to workplace challenge were often characterised by fixed and inflexible mindsets/behaviours.

**Discussion:** Resilient RVNs with growth mindsets may be more likely to perceive challenging events at work as motivating/satisfying. As mindset and resilience can be cultivated (Dweck, 2006), inclusion of such training in the RVN curriculum would seem sensible. However, reports of mindsets/resilience were often at odds with perceptions of/reactions to challenge and RVNs may need help in achieving greater congruence between 'espoused theory' and 'theory in use' (Argyris and Shon 1974).

**Conclusion:** Mindsets/resilience may not be a reliable indicator of reaction to workplace challenge. Reflective practice could help RVNs remain open to learning at work.

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### 14:45-15:00 2A.3 - An explanatory research on satisfaction in the Dutch veterinary practice

*Kris van den Bogaard MSc*

Kris is a Marketing Manager for MSD Animal Health in the Netherlands and obtained his master's degree in management at the Open University in the Netherlands (OUNL). With his master thesis on the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction in the Dutch veterinary practice, Kris opened a new value-added service on satisfaction provided by MSD Animal Health.

#### **Abstract:**

*Do happy employees make happy customers?*

*An explanatory research on satisfaction in the Dutch veterinary practice.*

**Background:** Several studies support a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. These studies, however, focus on service providers (eg banks, hotels, universities) and retailers. Research investigating the employee-customer satisfaction relationship in veterinary practices, to our knowledge, is scarce.

**Aims:** Our study aims to acknowledge and extend the positive relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction in a veterinary context where the 'customer' isn't the primary

service receiver. Additionally, we explore the moderating effect of communication type on the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction since a growing number of media are available to veterinary practices.

**Method:** Based on the Satisfaction of Employees in Health Care (SEHC) survey, a validated online questionnaire for veterinary practice employees was sent to practices to measure employee satisfaction together with a validated online survey based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) to measure customer satisfaction. In both surveys a question about the primary used communication type was included.

**Results:** Based on 1,003 pet owner records derived from 11 veterinary practices the relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction was supported. The moderating effect of the communication type, however, was not supported.

**Conclusion:** The positive effect of employee satisfaction on customer satisfaction is now also supported in the context of veterinary practices. The type of communication is suggested to have no effect on the employee-customer satisfaction link.

**Practical implication:** Veterinary practices aiming to increase customers' satisfaction should invest in, and take care of, the level of satisfaction of their employees.

# RESEARCH TALKS SESSION 2B

## 14:15-15:15 Research Talks 2B

James Russell, Senior Vice-President, British Veterinary Association

### 14:15-14:30 2B.1 - Students' perceptions of using two mental health apps during the COVID-19 pandemic

Kirstie Pickles BVMS MSc PGCert(Couns Skills) PhD  
CertEM(IntMed) DipECEIM MRCVS

Kirstie joined the University of Nottingham in September 2020 as a Clinical Assistant Professor in Equine Medicine. She graduated from the University of Glasgow in 1996, completed a residency and PhD at the Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies and became a diplomate of the European College of Equine Internal Medicine in 2009. She has worked in both clinical practice and academia in the UK, USA and New Zealand and is passionate about teaching, equine medicine, and neurodiversity and wellbeing in the veterinary profession.

#### Abstract:

*Students' Perceptions of Using Two Mental Health Apps During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

**Background:** Covid-19 associated anxiety, social distancing, lockdown, and the sudden change to virtual learning is likely to have presented additional difficulties for veterinary undergraduates. Use of smart phone apps for daily reporting of symptoms, mood state, behaviour and thoughts have proven useful in student populations<sup>1</sup>.

**Aim:** To perform a crossover study to evaluate students' use of two wellbeing apps during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Methods:** Students (n=27) were recruited and randomly assigned a mindfulness app (Smiling Mind®) or a mood tracking app (MindShift®) to use for eight weeks. Students then swapped to the other app for a further eight weeks. Usage data were submitted by students and wellbeing was assessed at weeks 0, 8 and 16 using the WEMWEBS questionnaire. Student evaluation of the apps was collected at the end of the study.

**Results:** Sixteen students completed the study. Most students (10/16) rated that the project had a positive impact on their wellbeing with only one stating it had a negative impact as it increased focus on negative emotions. Most frequently cited benefits were improved awareness of emotions (10/16) and improved sleep (5/16). Eight students preferred Smiling Mind, six preferred MindShift, and one student each liked or disliked both apps.

**Discussion and conclusions:** Mindfulness and mood tracking apps were equally popular with students.

Wellbeing apps may be a useful adjunct for supporting veterinary undergraduate students.

#### References

1. Kenny R, Dooley B, Fitzgerald A. Ecological Momentary Assessment of Adolescent Problems, Coping Efficacy, and Mood States Using a Mobile Phone App: An Exploratory Study. *JMIR Ment Health*. 2016 Nov 29;3(4):e51

### 14:30-14:45 2B.2 - Using a co-created interactive game to engage students with mental health awareness

Sabine Tötemeyer DiplBiol PhD MA(Higher Ed) SFHEA  
Georgina Bladon BVSc PGCert (VetEd) PGCHE MRCVS SFHEA

Sabine joined School of Veterinary Medical Science, University of Nottingham, in 2006 just before the first vet students arrived and has been involved in facilitating professional skills and student wellbeing sessions from the beginning. She trained as a Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) instructor in 2017 and is the MHFA lead for the vet school and a member of the MHFA team. The team plan, evaluate and deliver teaching as well as MHFA events for staff and students. Sabine is the module convener for the integrated module 'Student wellbeing & Mental Health Awareness. Sabine loves to engage students into the topic by co-creating teaching materials and using gamification and peer facilitation.

After qualifying from the University of Liverpool in 2016 as a Vet, Georgina worked in a small animal first opinion practice for two years. She discovered her love of teaching when helping vet students and owners in practice, and so undertook a Post Graduate certificate in Veterinary Education at the University of Nottingham. Georgina now works as a teaching associate at the University, and has a particular interest in supporting student wellbeing and preparing students for potential challenges they may face in clinical work.

#### Abstract:

*Using a co-created interactive game to engage students with mental health awareness*

Transition to university occurs at a time when young people are most likely to develop mental health problems. A proactive approach to self-care encourages veterinary students to develop strategies for the challenges of the course and the profession.

We co-created an interactive game with veterinary medicine students from years 1-5 to develop relevant challenges in a format that fosters discussion on how

# RESEARCH TALKS

## SESSION 2B

to support peers and themselves. The game allows students to consolidate, apply and embed their knowledge on stress management and the university support services. The 'student journey through year 1' was initially conceived as a board game, but due to Covid19 we had to develop an online version (openlabyrinth platform) for remote delivery. Scenarios covered Freshers' week, teaching, revision, placements and various aspects of student life. We chose a gender neutral name for the student in the game so it was relatable to all participants. The game is played in small groups with a peer facilitator to encourage frank discussions.

Students were asked to feedback on their experience of the game in an open question as part of larger questionnaire. Thematic analysis was applied to identify themes.

Student feedback was very positive (65 out of 88 comments), highlighting its interactivity, relevant scenarios and enjoyable format. Some students disliked the online delivery platform, discussion via Teams calls or where in the course it was delivered.

Overall, the game was perceived as engaging, however, its ultimate delivery as a face-to-face board game may lead to more discussion.

14:45-15:00

### **2B.3 - Emotional intelligence and its relationship with work engagement amongst veterinary surgeons in UK veterinary practice**

Sharon Cooksey BVSc MBA MRCVS

Sharon began working as a houseman at the RVC Equine and Large Animal unit and then moved into mainly equine practice for 16 years. In the late 2000s a move into the pharmaceutical industry brought experience in technical, sales and marketing management roles and led to a desire to understand more about particularly the human component of businesses. In December 2020 she gained an MBA distinction from the University of Liverpool and was awarded student of the year. In 2021 she began a PhD to discover a robust measure for, and the drivers of wellbeing (engagement) in UK practising vets.

#### **Abstract:**

Emotional intelligence ('EI') is often lauded as 'the' solution to improving many non-technical competencies<sup>1</sup>, eg, resilience, communication skills,

relationship management. However, few studies exist concerning the utility of EI in the profession. It seems intuitive that EI is involved in the role, nevertheless, understanding this complex construct and the detail involved is crucial to avoid futile efforts or the inadvertent exacerbation of critical issues within the profession.

Through the lens of work engagement ('WE'), a measurable outcome, this study attempted to introduce insight into the trait-emotional profile which might be beneficial to UK-practising vets.

WE in 348 UK-practising vets participating in the study demonstrated a highly statistically significant, strong, positive correlation ( $p < 0.01$ ) with trait-EI. Moreover, one factor of trait-EI, 'EI-Wellbeing', was found to be the only influential EI-factor in predicting WE (exceeding the predictive capability of Total-EI) in the final multiple linear regression model. This finding supports the theory that a role-specific EI profile might be critical to the attainment of high WE for vets working in practice.

EI was examined in several demographic groups within the study. There is a well-established positive relationship between age and EI, such that EI develops with age and experience<sup>2</sup>. Of concern was a finding that EI showed no significant increase with age-group in this study. Experienced vets tend to hold more leadership positions and significantly influence younger colleagues.

Initiatives aimed at enhancing trait-EI, particularly EI-Wellbeing, may, via the relationship with WE, improve vets' capability to thrive whilst remaining in practice

#### **References**

1. Goleman, D. (1998) 'What Makes a Leader?', *Harvard Business Review*, 76(6), pp. 93–102. Available at: <https://search.ebscohost-com.liverpool.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edselc&AN=edselc.2-52.0-0032200991&site=eds-live&scope=site> (accessed; 21 November 2019)
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# ABOUT MIND MATTERS

**The Mind Matters Initiative (MMI) aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of those in the veterinary team, including students, veterinary nurses, veterinary surgeons and practice managers.**

MMI began life in 2014 and was formally launched in 2015. It is funded and run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), the regulatory body for veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses in the UK.

The RCVS takes the mental health and welfare of members of the veterinary profession seriously, and was kicked off with a five-year, one-million-pound commitment from the RCVS. During 2018, RCVS Council agree to extend the programme beyond its initial five years, on a rolling three-year basis.

Mind Matters is a pan-professional initiative, supported by a taskforce comprising representatives from key veterinary and veterinary nursing organisations, including:

- Association of Veterinary Students
- British Small Animal Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Association
- British Veterinary Nursing Association
- Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons
- Veterinary Defence Society
- Veterinary Management Group
- Veterinary Schools Council
- Vetlife

We offer mental health awareness training and try to break down the stigma associated with mental ill-health. We also develop and support resources and courses to help students, vets, nurses and practice managers to flourish, and, when needed, to get back on form.

Our programme is divided into three streams of activity:

**Prevent** – proactively looking at systemic issues within the veterinary profession to help minimise the chance of people becoming unwell in the first place. Our joint anti-stigma campaign, &me, which we run with the Doctors' Support Network, also falls under this stream of activity.

**Protect** – a programme of communications and training designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge they need to stay well, even when working under challenging conditions.

**Support** – financial and other support for existing independent services, such as Vet Support, Vetlife Helpline and Vetlife Health Support, together with an investigation into what more may be required to support those in need, and catalysing the development of those services.

Mental health issues affect the veterinary team across the world, it's not just a UK situation. In recognition of the importance of supporting the veterinary family wherever it may be, we are starting to work internationally, and were delighted to sign a memorandum of understanding with the American Veterinary Medical Association in 2018, which has now been cosigned by eight international organisations.

**Mind Matters is not your first port of call if you are in crisis or need direct and immediate help. If that is the case, please turn to the Vetlife Helpline, which we support, both financially and in kind. The Vetlife Helpline is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, on 0303 040 2551. There is also a confidential and anonymous email service, accessible via [vetlife.org.uk](https://vetlife.org.uk)**



The Mind Matters Initiative is run by the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons  
[www.vetmindmatters.org](http://www.vetmindmatters.org)  
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